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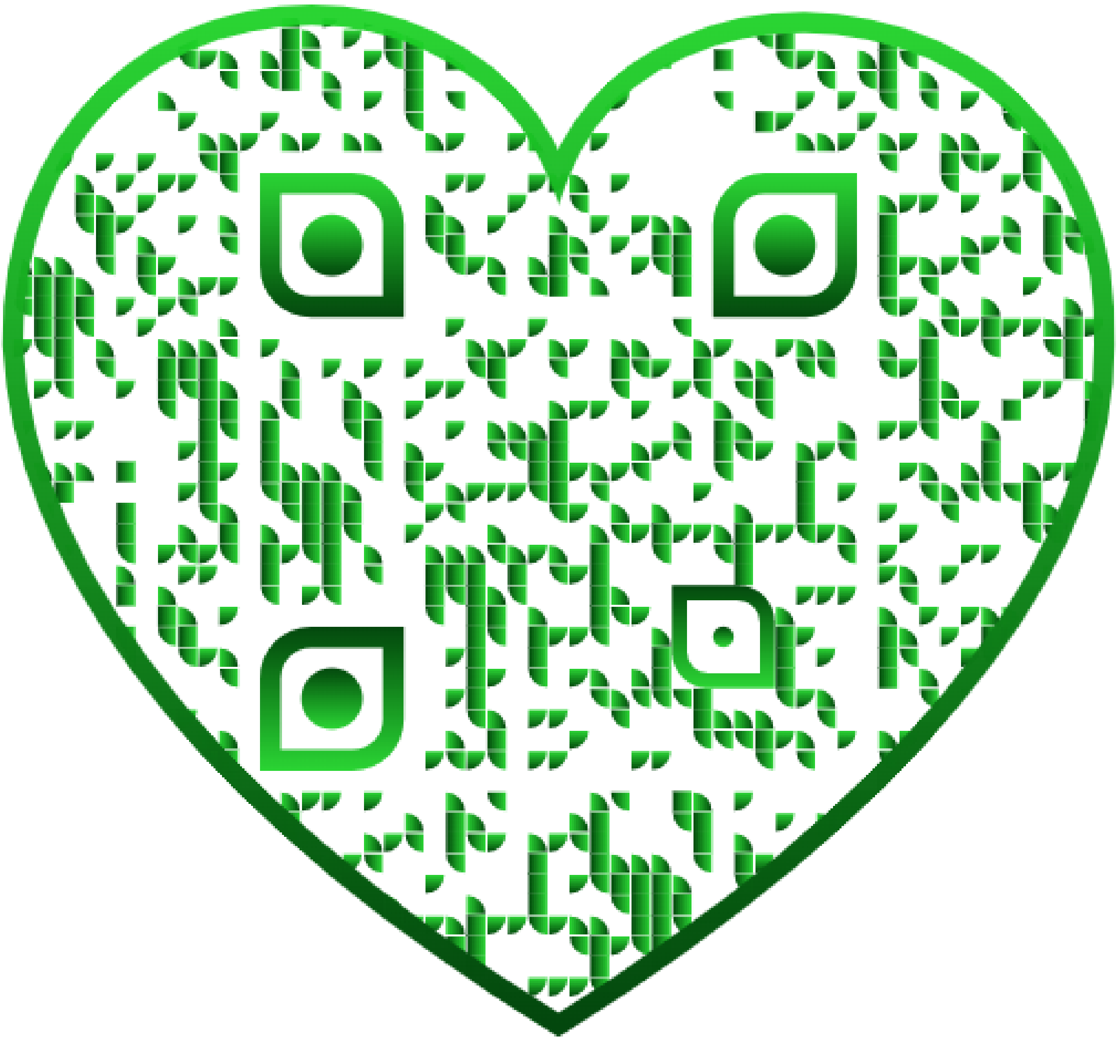

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Joy, duty & drama

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- All the best photos from a year of royal duty – and drama!

PLUS we celebrate Christmas the royal way with must-have fashion, beauty, home and gift inspiration

ON SALE NOW!

this week in bella

Panto's BACK!

Oh yes, we do want to see these stars take on the 2025 panto season…

The festive season wouldn't be the same without a trip to the pantomime – and this Christmas, some of our favourite stars are performing around the UK.

This year, Catherine Tate will join Julian Clary and Nigel Havers to tread the boards at the London Palladium in *Sleeping Beauty*. *Strictly* fans will be delighted that La Voix will be performing at the Wycombe Swan with Scott Mills, and in Nottingham, we're sure judge Craig Revel Horwood will be 'fabulous, darling' as the Wicked Stepmother in *Cinderella*.

Call The Midwife star Helen George will appear in Richmond's production of *Cinderella* – alongside Basil Brush! He's not the only puppet to be stealing the limelight, though, as Sooty and Sweep are set to star in *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the Bristol Hippodrome, with Will Young and Charlie Brooks. Lesley Joseph and Rob Rinder are heading to Woking to star in *Snow White*. And there'll also be the battle of the Robin Hoods, as Jason Manford is taking on the role at Opera House Manchester, and Ashley Banjo in Wimbledon (the rest of Diversity are his Merry Men!).

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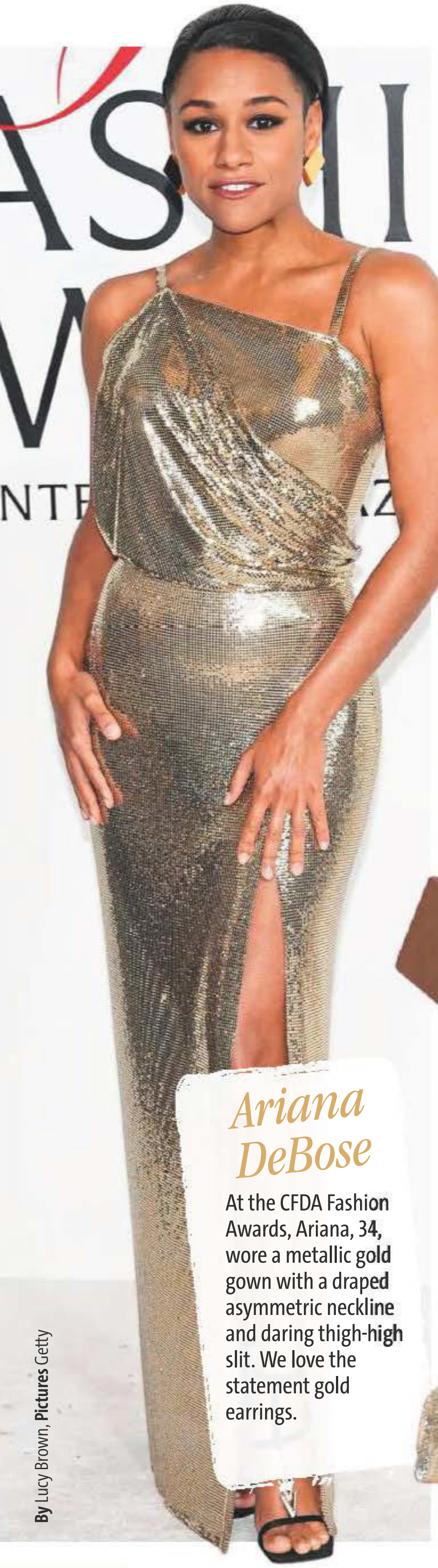
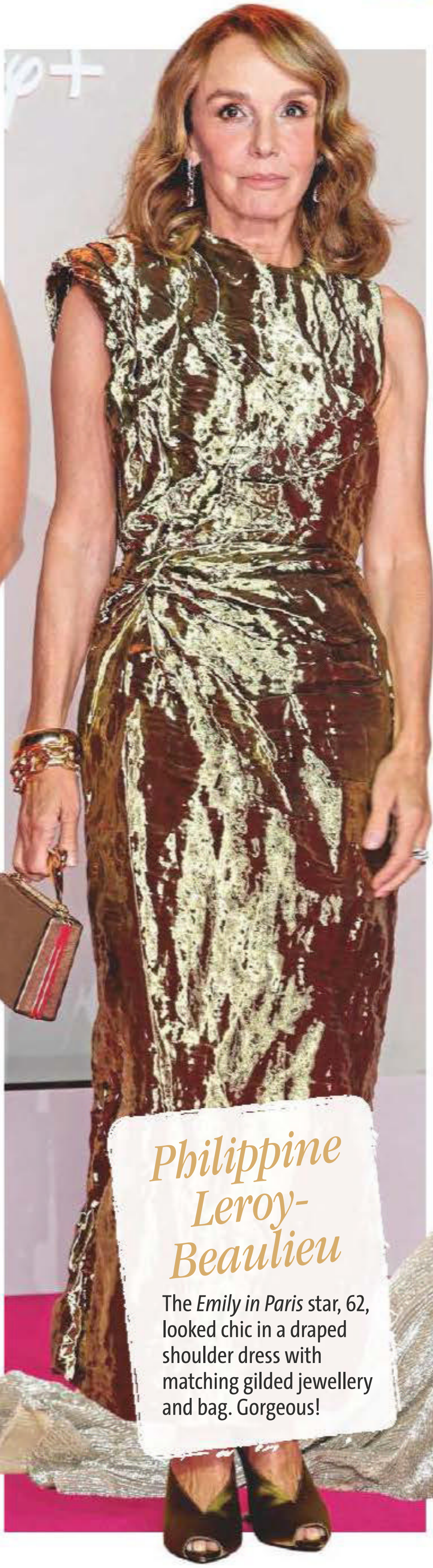
By Sophie Cockerham, **Pictures** Instagram **Cover pictures:** Shutterstock, Getty, Instagram

Golden



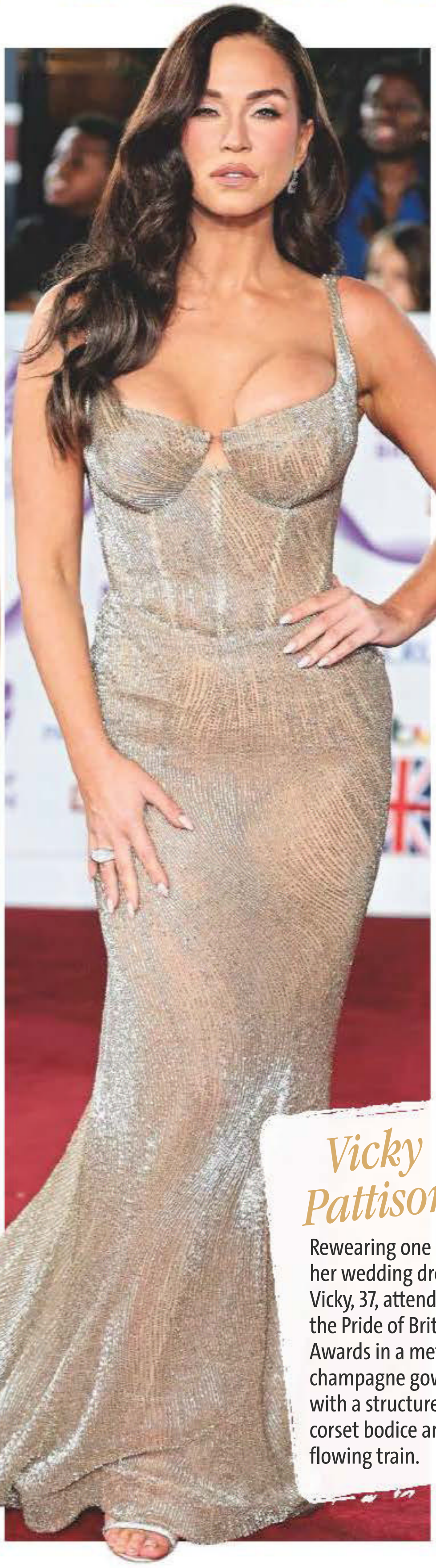
Ariana DeBose

At the CFDA Fashion Awards, Ariana, 34, wore a metallic gold gown with a draped asymmetric neckline and daring thigh-high slit. We love the statement gold earrings.



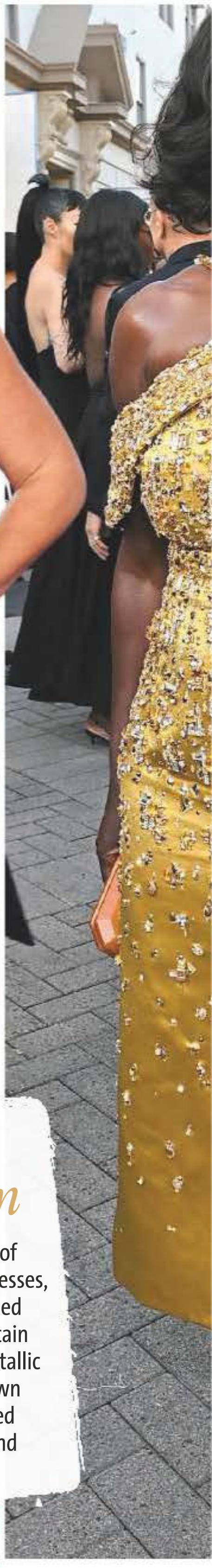
Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu

The *Emily in Paris* star, 62, looked chic in a draped shoulder dress with matching gilded jewellery and bag. Gorgeous!



Vicky Pattison

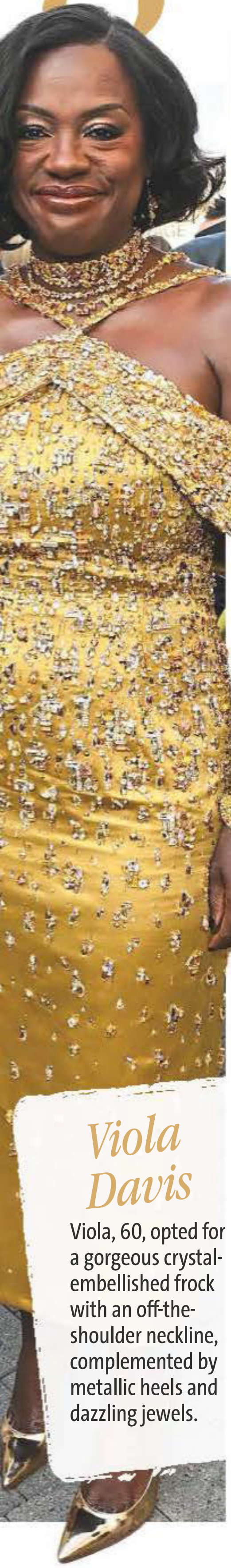
Rewearing one of her wedding dresses, Vicky, 37, attended the Pride of Britain Awards in a metallic champagne gown with a structured corset bodice and flowing train.



By Lucy Brown, **Pictures** Getty

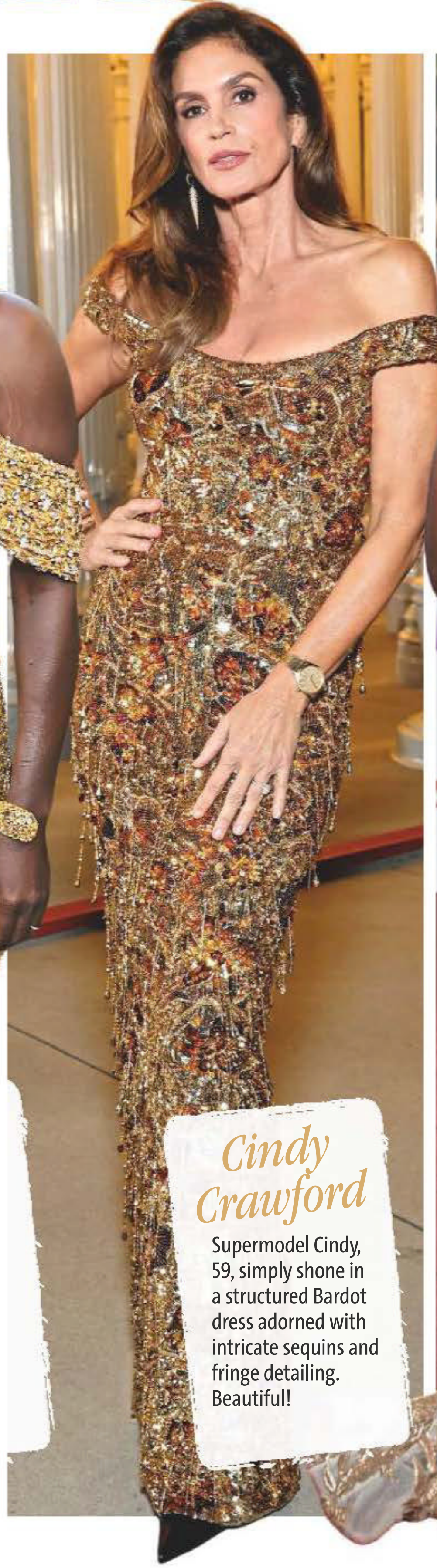
girls

Celebs are shining in magic metallics



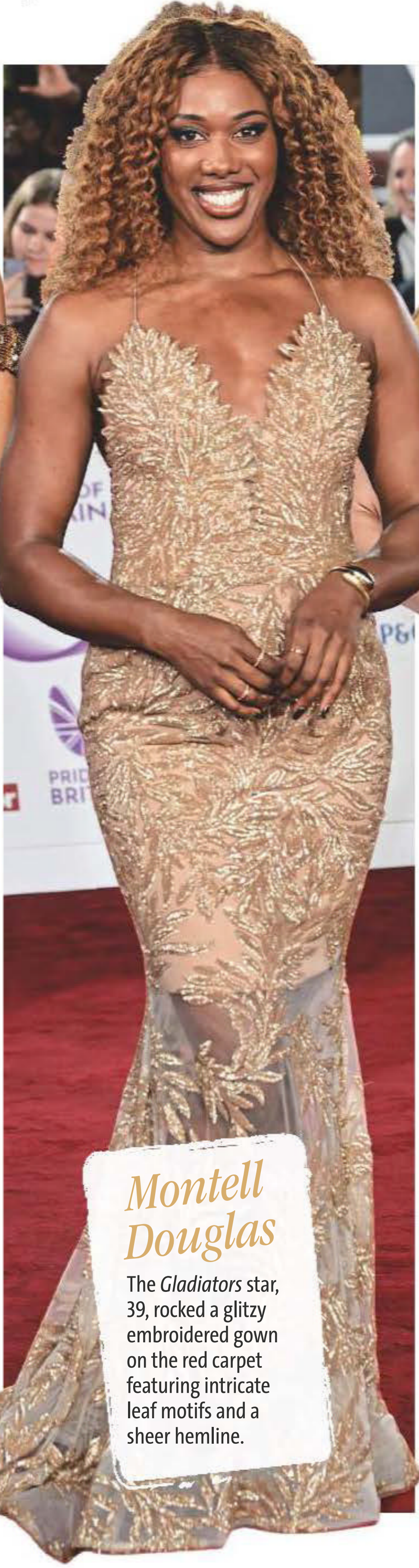
Viola Davis

Viola, 60, opted for a gorgeous crystal-embellished frock with an off-the-shoulder neckline, complemented by metallic heels and dazzling jewels.



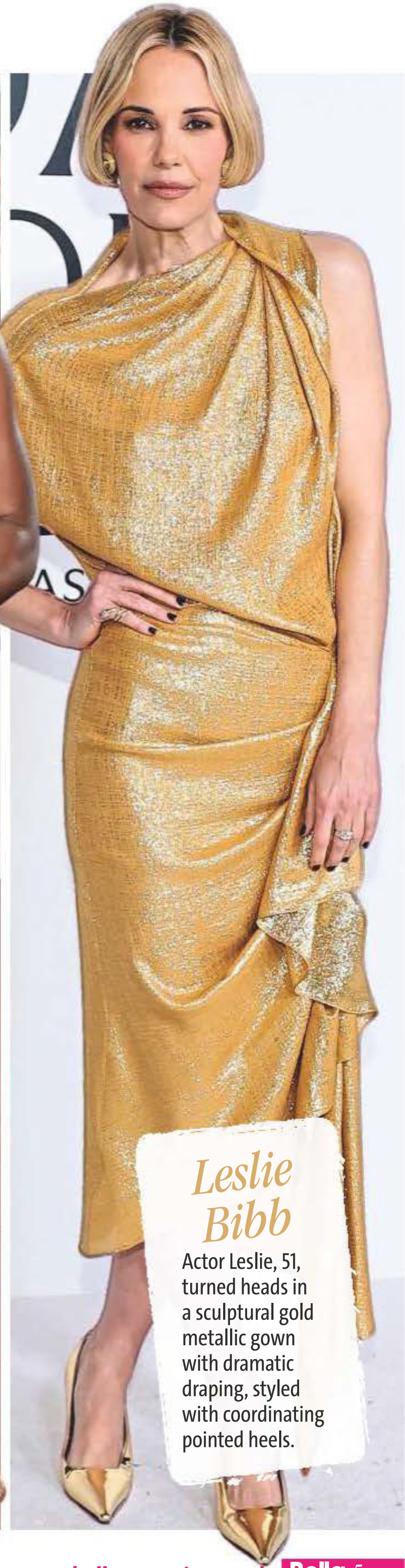
Cindy Crawford

Supermodel Cindy, 59, simply shone in a structured Bardot dress adorned with intricate sequins and fringe detailing. Beautiful!



Montell Douglas

The *Gladiators* star, 39, rocked a glitzy embroidered gown on the red carpet featuring intricate leaf motifs and a sheer hemline.



Leslie Bibb

Actor Leslie, 51, turned heads in a sculptural gold metallic gown with dramatic draping, styled with coordinating pointed heels.

Adele says 'Hello' to Hollywood

It's been four years since we've had new music from Adele and we could be waiting a while longer, as the 37-year-old singer has got her sights set on Hollywood. Adele is due to make her film debut in *Cry to Heaven* – an upcoming movie created by former fashion designer Tom Ford.

Adapted from the 1982 novel by Anne Rice, the film is set in the 18th century and follows the lives of two castrati who find stardom as professional opera singers. The singer's exact role is yet to be revealed, but it has been confirmed that she will star alongside the likes of Nicholas Hoult, Aaron Taylor-Johnson, Paul Bettany, Colin Firth and Owen Cooper, the breakout star of Netflix's *Adolescence*.

Exclusive

KELLY: 'I WON'T TAKE DRUGS TO GET SKINNY'

I'm A Celeb's Kelly Brook is happy to embrace the rice and beans diet

One star who has always set the bar high for body confidence is Kelly Brook. And now, as it's reported she screen tested six bikinis to find the perfect one for her jungle shower shot before joining *I'm A Celebrity… Get Me Out Of Here!*, a source tells *Bella* how the 46-year-old is hoping the outback diet will help her achieve her ideal figure.

The source says, 'Kelly confided in pals before heading to the jungle that she wants to get her dream body the natural way – on a diet of rice and beans. She would never take drugs to get skinny. She hopes the jungle will be a total mental therapy detox for her. She wants to ditch the baggage and leave it at home. Most enter the jungle with the mindset of trepidation for what's in store, but not in Kelly's case.

'She is a meticulous planner and has more than just a jungle game plan, she's set herself goals. She doesn't want to just empower women with curves, she wants to celebrate them!'

Before heading into the jungle – which has seen the likes of Ruby Wax, 72, Martin Kemp, 64, Alex Scott, 41, and Jack Osbourne, 40 set up camp – Kelly opened up on her fears that online trolls may criticise her body shape.

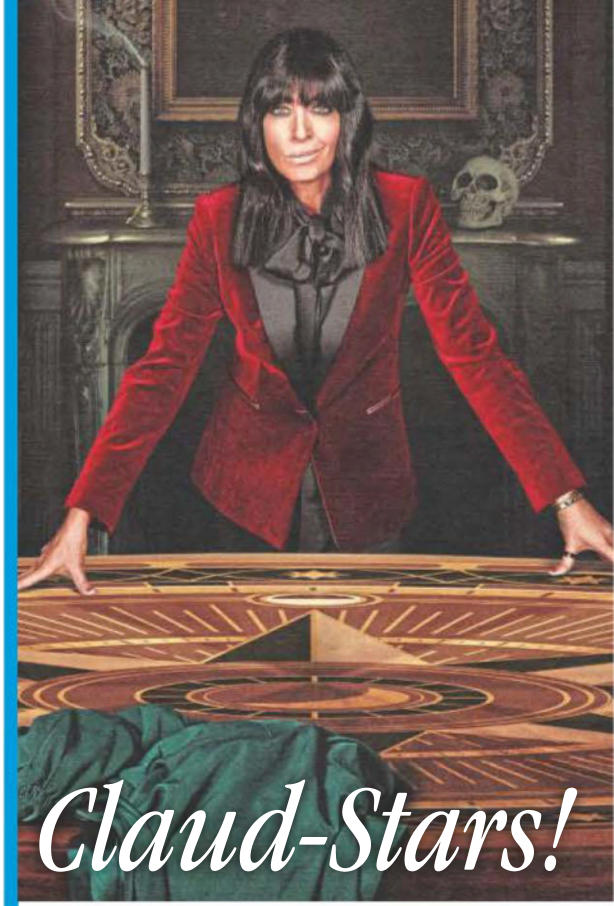
She said, 'I am not a 20-year-old bikini model any more. I just hope people are accepting of me and how I look now and not comparing me to how I used to look. I am a very different person. I am older, but I am still strong and I am still fit, and that is the most important thing.'

HOLLY AND PADDY FOR STRICTLY JOB?

With just weeks to go until Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman say goodbye to *Strictly*, it has been reported that Holly Willoughby is the firm favourite to take over. Claiming 'with great confidence' that the former *This Morning* host has landed the gig, a celebrity hairdresser is said to have spilled the goss after learning the news from a client. Speaking at Winter Wonderland in London's Hyde Park recently, Holly teased, 'At the moment, I'm just having a lovely time at home watching *Strictly*.' Meanwhile, it has also been claimed that, in a recent meeting, a BBC boss 'really got behind' Paddy McGuinness, urging him to go for Claudia's role of interviewing the contestants.

Return to EastEnders

We've already had Zoe Slater and Max Branning return to *EastEnders* this year, and now two more iconic characters are on their way back to Walford. This December, Pam St Clement will be reprising her role as the legendary Pat Evans, along with Shaun Williamson, who will be coming back as Barry Evans. Pat and her stepson Barry will appear in a special one-off episode focusing on Nigel Bates' dementia storyline. Nigel's memories transport him back to the Queen Vic in the '90s, where Pat and Barry put their differences aside to help him.



Claud-Stars!

While a second series of *The Celebrity Traitors* has been given the green light, we can also expect to see an All Stars version of the BBC One show being created in the future, according to reports. Players from the three civilian series could be set to re-enter the iconic castle for another chance at glory alongside stars of the celebrity version, such as winner Alan Carr and Traitor hunter Joe Marler. An executive producer dubbed the idea 'really exciting' but insisted nothing is in the works yet.

By Danni King, **Pictures** ITV, Instagram, Getty, Shutterstock

WEEK IN PICS

Lucy says yes!

There were double celebrations for *Corrie*'s Lucy Fallon, as her partner Ryan Ledson proposed on her 30th birthday. The mum-of-two, who plays Bethany Platt, shared the news on Instagram, saying she 'can't wait' to marry footballer Ryan.

Princess of Recycling

The Princess Royal proved you can be both sustainable and stylish during her recent two-day tour of Singapore. Anne, 75, was seen sporting a beige suit, which she first wore back in 1973 while attending a polo match.

Rachel's mini-me

S Club singer Rachel Stevens shared a gushing tribute to her lookalike daughter Amelie, 15, to mark her birthday. Describing her as 'resilient' and 'caring', the mum-of-two also revealed the teenager has 'the voice of an angel'. Like mother, like daughter!

Prince William isn't backing down

Exclusive

William and 'THIS WILL

As the Waleses prepare to travel to the US next year, sources tell *Bella* the royal rift could also head stateside

With hopes of peace talks between estranged brothers Prince William and Prince Harry being firmly forgotten, there are concerns that the royal rift is about to step up a gear, with all-out war on the horizon. Sources tell *Bella* there are plans for William and Kate Middleton, both 43, to take centre stage in one of the most symbolic royal visits in decades. The couple are expected to take a trip to Harry and Meghan Markle's homeland of the United States next year as part of an official tour.

Kate is said to be 'resolute'

Although plans are underway for King Charles, 77, and Queen Camilla, 78, to lead Britain's presence at the celebrations to mark 250 years on US Independence Day, we're told that with the King's ongoing health concerns, Palace aides are drawing up contingency ideas for Prince William and Princess Kate to join the occasion alongside the monarchs in a powerful show of unity.

'It's one of the biggest diplomatic moments of the decade,' a senior aide explains. 'The King is expected to lead the charge, but William and Kate are ready to fly the flag – and the Palace wants them involved either way.' Behind the scenes, courtiers view the 2026 visit as a moment that could reshape the global perception of the monarchy – and a chance for William and Kate to reclaim the spotlight and destroy Harry and Meghan's faux royal presence on American soil.

> 'They have real star power'

'This isn't just another royal tour, it's a statement,' the insider tells *Bella*. 'America has become the Sussexes' playground, but the Waleses are showing they can own that stage too – with grace, duty and real star power.'

The tour will coincide with America's semiquincentennial – 250 years since the signing of the Declaration of Independence – and will echo Queen Elizabeth II's iconic 1976 bicentennial visit. It's

Harry's all-out war: DESTROY THEM'

Plans are in place in case Harry steals the spotlight

Will Meghan be upstaged?

Trump is thought to have personally requested Kate and William

being described in Whitehall as 'soft diplomacy meets star power,' with the US government eager to roll out the red carpet.

US president Donald Trump, who has commissioned a new ballroom at the White House for the anniversary, is said to have personally requested that William and Kate headline the British delegation. Sources confirm he has 'no intention' of inviting Harry, 41, or Meghan, 44, whom he reportedly blames for 'disrespecting the monarchy.'

'Trump wants pomp, prestige and proper royalty,' the source says. 'For him, that means William and Kate — not Hollywood exiles.' But another insider tells us Meghan 'doesn't like it when Kate is on her turf,' and is already preparing to overshadow anything the Waleses do in the States. Behind the scenes, officials are said to be negotiating carefully to prevent the Sussexes from staging any rival events during the same week. 'There's awareness that Harry and Meghan might try to steal the spotlight. Meghan, especially, will be furious at being upstaged on home soil,' the source continues. 'The Palace is working to make sure that doesn't happen. This trip is about the monarchy, not the Montecito brand.'

If there were ever doubts about a royal press war, those vanished earlier this month when William's photos from his goodwill trip to Brazil were quickly followed by near-identical images of Harry posing with veterans in Canada.

'It was a game of one-upmanship in real time,' the source adds. 'Every time William steps out in the name of duty, Harry seems to counter with his own photo op – it's become a tit-for-tat PR duel. The trip to the US is the Waleses way of reclaiming the upper hand.'

And in a shock twist, Kate – once happy to be peacemaker between the brothers – has finally put her foot down. 'She's resolute now,' says the source. 'There's no room for chaos – not from Andrew, and certainly not from Harry and Meghan. Their time's up.'

Meanwhile, our source says that Kate's close relationship with US First Lady Melania Trump has strengthened behind the scenes. 'They get on really well. They've kept in touch since Melania's UK visit and are quietly helping move official possibilities along.'

> 'It's a line in the sand'

And from their new Windsor base at Forest Lodge, William and Kate are quietly reshaping the monarchy in their own image. Our source says, 'The Waleses are building what insiders call "the practical monarchy" – one that feels real and relatable. They're not interested in grandeur; they're focused on purpose.'

That sense of purpose will be on full display when they land in the US next year as William and Kate are expected to have a significant presence during the visit – a clear signal that the future of the Crown has already arrived.

'America loves a good royal story,' the insider adds. 'This trip will cement William and Kate as the world's favourite royal couple – and remind everyone, including the Sussexes, who truly represents the monarchy.

'William and Kate's US visit will be more than diplomacy. It's a statement – a line in the sand. The Waleses are coming to America, and they're not just representing the Crown, they're reclaiming it.'

By Nathan Kay and Samuel McManus, **Pictures** WireImage, Getty Images, Alamy.

PAULINE'S FAMILY: 'We don't know how long we hav

The *Birds of a Feather* star's husband and son give an update on her health after shock dementia diagnosis

Charlie is walking to raise money for charity

Ten months after announcing her retirement due to dementia, Pauline Quirke's family have opened up about her condition. In an emotional TV interview, the star's husband Steve Sheen and their son Charlie spoke about the 66 year old's health. Pauline – who was awarded an MBE in 2022 – was diagnosed with the debilitating disease in 2021.

'It's so gradual that for the first year, two years, you're thinking, "Ah, she's alright". Now, we're three or four years in, and it's a little bit different,' Steve said. 'We didn't know how long it would last or how long you have with it, or how bad it is or how quick it is.

'Unfortunately, we are not in the state where we can do much about it. Just take every day and try and take the best moments out of that day you can.'

Charlie, 31, revealed that Pauline's illness 'progresses and changes every day'. 'My mum knows exactly who we are. Every time she sees all of us, she smiles, laughs, says, "I love you" and "hello".' Steve adds, 'She's still funny, she's talking, she's happy. She's loving, brilliant, funny, warm.'

With her fellow *Birds* Linda Robson and Lesley Joseph

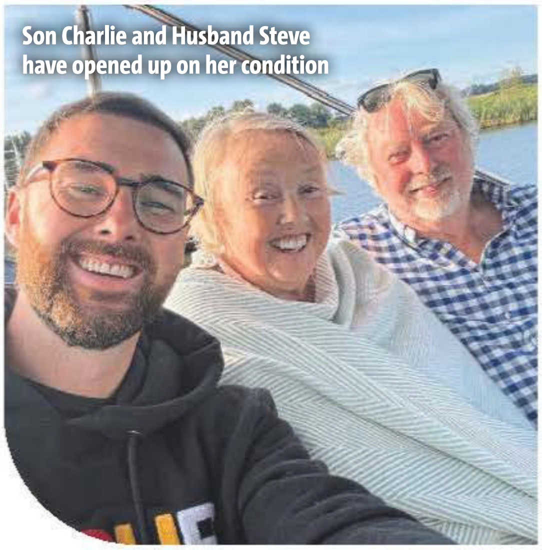
The *Birds Of A Feather* and *Broadchurch* actor, whose career spans 50 years, was diagnosed after she struggled to read a script in November 2020. Steve said they were in 'disbelief', recalling, 'She phoned me on that day and said, "The words are not going in." That's where it started. We looked at each other and went, "Nah, can't be, it's long Covid. You've got the flu."'

Charlie – who has followed in his mum's acting footsteps – will embark on a charity trek next month to raise funds for Alzheimer's Research UK. Over five days, from 8 to 12 December, he will retrace Pauline's steps and visit significant places from her life for *Charlie Quirke's Trek For A Cure*. He will start in Chigwell, Essex, where *Birds Of A Feather* was set, visiting Greater London, Surrey and Berkshire, before ending at their family home in Buckinghamshire, where he'll be met by Pauline, Steve and his sister Emily, 41.

> 'We were in disbelief'

'It's going to be physically and emotionally challenging. I imagine each day will be a mix of tears, laughs and above all else, so much e’

Pauline was diagnosed with dementia in 2021



Son Charlie and Husband Steve have opened up on her condition

love for my mum,’ Charlie said. ‘I’ve never walked that far before, but what will keep me going is knowing that I’ll be reaching places that mean so much to Mum. There’s so much about her life that I don’t know, so I’m excited to learn more about her as I go.’

He added, ‘My mum has always been my best friend and dementia hasn’t changed that. She is an incredible, strong, courageous woman who’s been through a lot and she keeps going. She’s a fighter. It’s incredible to see and I’m very proud of her.’

● *To support Charlie Quirke’s Trek For A Cure, text ‘CHARLIE5’, ‘CHARLIE10’ or ‘CHARLIE20’ to 70255 to donate £5, £10 or £20 respectively. Alternatively, donate online at trek.charliestrek.org*

Adam Peaty’s mum has been ‘uninvited’ from his wedding

Exclusive

Adam’s heartbroken mum: ‘IT’S LIKE A KICK IN THE TEETH’

Adam Peaty’s family feud has reached another level

Adam with Holly and her famous parents

Wedding drama is unfolding for Olympic swimmer Adam Peaty and his fiancée Holly Ramsay – the daughter of TV chef Gordon Ramsay.

Adam, 30, and Holly, 25, who met when he competed alongside Holly’s sister Tilly on *Strictly Come Dancing* in 2021, got engaged last September, but as they gear up for their December wedding, a nasty feud is threatening to tear the family apart, with Adam’s mum Caroline reportedly banned from the ceremony.

‘It’s highly unlikely that Caroline will go to the wedding. Too much has happened,’ a source tells *Bella*. ‘If she doesn’t attend, she’ll follow it on social media like everyone else. It’s very sad. Her heart is broken.’

The tension reportedly began when Caroline, 59, wasn’t invited to Holly’s lavish hen do at the exclusive Soho Farmhouse – an event attended by Holly’s mum, Tana, 51, and her best pal Victoria Beckham, among other famous faces.

Meanwhile, Adam invited his future father-in-law Gordon, 59, to his stag do, making the absence of his own mother at the celebrations all the more conspicuous. Although Adam’s sister did attend, Caroline’s absence didn’t go unnoticed.

It has also been reported that Caroline was initially left ‘humiliated’ when being told she wasn’t allowed to wear the dress she had bought for the wedding. ‘Adam said she couldn’t come unless she changed the dress,’ the source explains. ‘And he refused to pay for a new one until she apologised for all the issues.’

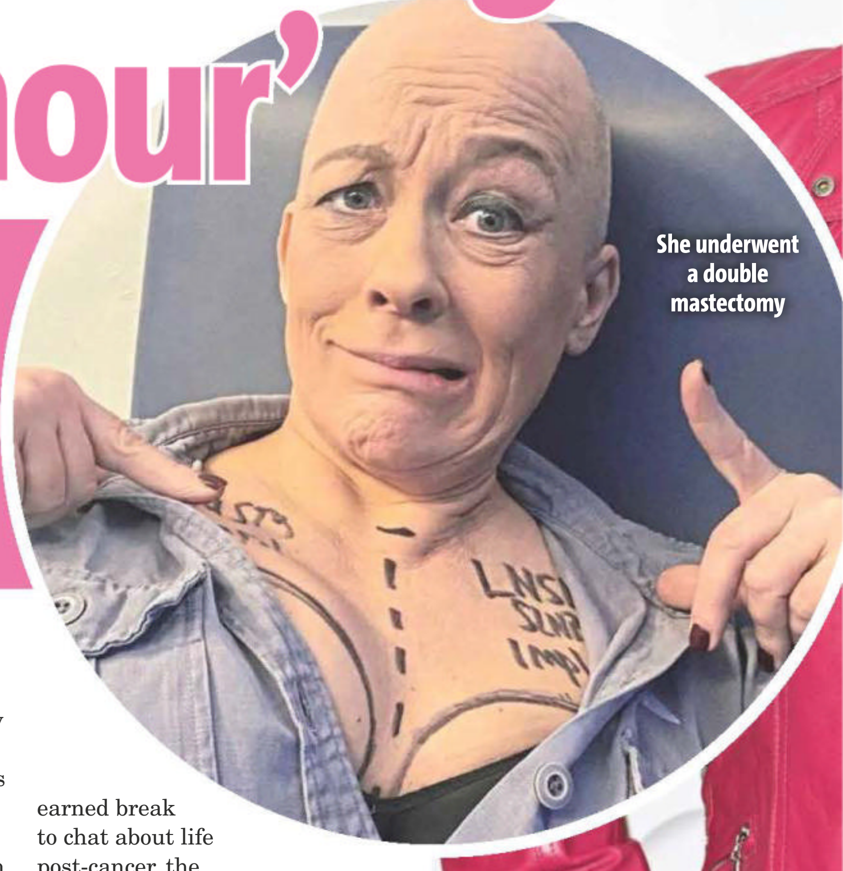
Things quickly escalated. ‘Adam called Caroline a crap mother,’ the source says. ‘He used profanity. After all she’s done [to support his career], it’s like a kick in the teeth.’

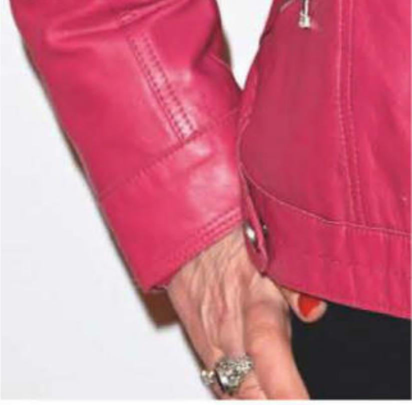
By Shereen Low, **Pictures** Alzheimer’s Research UK, Alamy, Shutterstock

Exclusive

'Cancer didn't change my life – I didn't give it that honour'

After facing breast cancer, Sarah Beeny is keen to put the experience behind her and focus on the future


She underwent a double mastectomy



When Sarah Beeny was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2023, life as she knew it was put on pause – but not for long. Throughout the 53-year-old's chemotherapy, double mastectomy surgery, hair loss and the emotional fallout that comes with a life-altering illness, she admits she 'went into overdrive', becoming even more productive than usual. She also bravely chose to let cameras into her home for a Channel 4 documentary, *Sarah Beeny vs Cancer*, where she opened up about her journey to help others feel less alone.

Now, two years on, she tells *Bella* about that period of her life – with a frankness that few can match. And it's this grit and pragmatism that have shaped her entire career. From building a property empire in her twenties to becoming one of TV's most recognisable renovation experts, she has fronted countless hit shows, written books, launched businesses – ranging from a dating website to an estate agency – and championed sustainability. And now she's supporting her sons Billy, 21, Charlie, 19, Rafferty, 17, and Laurie, 16, whom she shares with husband of 23 years, Graham Swift, as their band, The Entitled Sons, hits the mainstream.

After writing her latest book, *100 DIY Jobs*, Sarah takes a well-earned break to chat about life post-cancer, the importance of family and Christmas plans at her home in the Somerset countryside…

Husband Graham is her best friend

How are you feeling now health-wise?

I just feel lucky. Lucky in terms of diagnosis, treatment, everything. And lucky to be in the UK with the NHS. It feels a long time ago now – maybe not for others, but for me it does. I'm just incredibly fortunate.

You've said you didn't have a dramatic 'new lease on life' moment afterwards...

Cancer didn't change my life – I didn't want to give it that honour. My sons have changed me far more positively than cancer ever did.

Was filming your documentary difficult?

Not really. Once I knew I'd lose my hair, I realised it would be public anyway, and I didn't want my sons to feel they had to keep it secret. And if it helped even one

PRESTIGE & VILLAG

With her husband and musician sons

person, it was worth it. Oddly, it kept me focused too.

Did your double mastectomy affect your body image?

The first surgery went wrong, so I had to have everything redone six months later – the implants hardened and reacted badly. But I still feel lucky. My mum went through cancer 40 years ago, when the surgery was far more drastic. I have the PALB2 gene, so I had bilateral surgery and my ovaries removed. But I was 50 with four children, so it didn't disrupt my life in the way it would have if I'd been younger.

How did you feel about losing your hair?

It was a shock, but I'd always secretly wanted to shave my head and never had the nerve – so in a way, I finally got to try it! When it grew back, I bleached it peroxide blonde and quite liked it.

You and your husband have worked together for years. What's your secret?

I married my best friend. He makes me laugh, and he's good looking, which helps!

Are any of your sons following you into property?

No. All four are into music. They're doing brilliantly: sold-out tours, playing The O2 and Shepherd's Bush Empire. They still live at home, and I don't charge rent – but I do insist they work hard!

What will Christmas look like in Somerset?

Busy and lovely. My brother and his family come, plus my wonderful mother-in-law. On Christmas Eve we dress up smartly, play silly word games, and my brother cooks beef Wellington. Christmas Day is turkey, card games, poker and 'Live Cluedo', which is basically *The Traitors* before *The Traitors*! Stockings are filled with useful bits – toiletries, food – nothing wasteful. It's wonderful. Now the kids are all adults, so it's relaxed and fun with far less pressure. I can't wait.

Do you have a New Year's resolution?

To declutter. I've been meaning to for ages. I'm very conscious of not buying new things. If I buy anything, it's from a charity shop or it's edible. My aim is to avoid buying anything new unless absolutely essential.

You've had a successful career. Do you feel proud of all you've achieved?

It's been busy! Sometimes I list everything and think, 'Wow, that's quite a lot.' I have very diverse interests! I've learned so much about completely different industries, and I feel genuinely privileged.

What's next work-wise?

I'm filming a new show called *I Bought It At Auction*, following people who buy homes at auction. I think it'll be fascinating. And my sons' band has been on tour, so I've spent a lot of time following them around making tea! I've also written *100 DIY Jobs*; the digital age has left many of us feeling out of control and out of our comfort zones. We've lost a lot of practical ability as the world has become more advanced. So the book came from wanting to help people reclaim those simple skills.

● *Sarah Beeny's 100 DIY Jobs (Quadrille, £25) is available now*

By Kirsty Nutkins, **Pictures** Getty Images, Instagram/Sarah Beeny, Channel 4, Alamy

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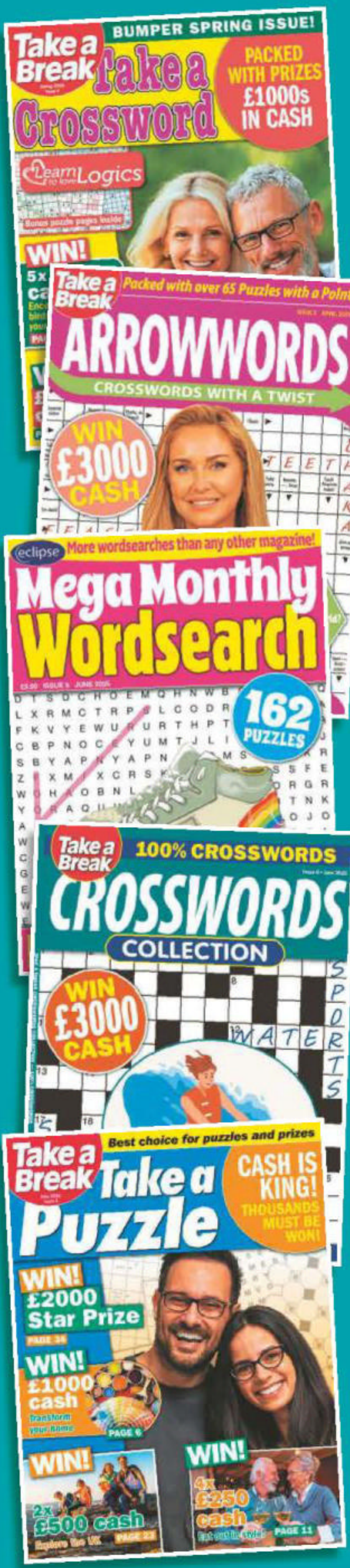

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bella debate

With the demand for non-alcoholic beverages at an all-time high, some parents have questioned how appropriate they are for children. *So, we ask…*

Is it a bad idea to give your kids alcohol-free beer?

No

'We've given him a safe, harmless introduction'

Kim Willis, 43, writer

After countless years acting like a prat and suffering unbearable hangovers, I gave up drinking six years ago.

But I still enjoy the cold, crisp taste of a 0% cider on a summer's day – and my three-year-old son Heli, loves to have a swig.

His water is untouched as he gulps down what is essentially apple juice, and I'm fine about it.

I'd rather he drank his water, but that's only because 0% cider is full of sugar and not because I have any problem with him enjoying the taste of something that mimics an alcoholic beverage.

He's not about to turn into a toddler booze hound! He's just having a harmless sip of Mummy's drink, just as he would if I had ordered an elderflower cordial.

My husband loves a CBD drink, and we tell Heli he can't have that because it's an adult drink.

Even a low ABV of 2% would be a hard no. But 0%? Absolutely fine!

It's like chocolate and screen time – if you deny children a little of what they fancy, you feed the beast. You glorify the forbidden fruit.

By giving Heli a sip, he quickly loses interest. If I denied him one, it would be all he wanted, so better to let him have a try.

If he chooses to drink alcohol when he's older, hopefully we've given him a safe, harmless introduction that shows him alcohol isn't really that special.

Yes

'We should all be cutting back'

Hannah Doyle, 41, author

Call me a control freak, but the idea of offering my nine-year-old sons fizzy pop masquerading as alcohol breaks me out in a cold sweat. The sugar content in most 0% drinks is through the roof!

Every now and then, my kids will have a hot chocolate or strawberry milk. And, when their mates come round, I'll stock up on fresh fruit juices.

On holiday I do relax the no fizzy drinks rule. But for the most part, we're all knocking back water like it's going out of fashion. I think it's because I've been obsessed with hydration for as long as I can remember. Even though my teenage years were spent sampling lurid green alcopops, water would always be there to make me feel better the next day. So, it was inevitable that my kids would be super-hydrated too.

The latest research suggests that no amount of booze is good for you and we should all be cutting back. So, I definitely don't want to encourage my young, impressionable children to mimic drinking.

Thankfully, alcohol seems like less of a teenage rite of passage than it was when I was growing up. I hope that by the time my boys are old enough to drink, it won't be remotely cool any more.

SHARE YOUR VIEW **…with Bella** online at **bellamagazine.co.uk** or on **facebook.com/bellamagazineUK**

By Amber Connolly. **Pictures:** Shutterstock

'An Xmas miracle brought us together – 26 years after we broke up!'

When Julie Bray, 63, popped into the supermarket, it changed everything…

Making a beeline for the mirror in the jeans shop where I worked, I spotted my colleague Mark already checking himself out and rolled my eyes. 'Out of the way,' I giggled, shoving him aside so I could backcomb my hair to perfection. It was 1979 and we were trendy teenagers in Camberley, Surrey. I was in my tight drainpipe Levi's and Jelly shoes with odd socks – I looked the part. Similarly, Mark rocked denim Liberty dungarees and it wasn't long before we were flirting behind the boss's back. Staff romances were frowned upon, so Mark and I kept things under wraps – when our boss drove us to meetings, we'd hold hands under Mark's coat in the back seat. It felt so romantic.

At 17 and 19, we made a cool couple and Mark made me laugh. There was just one problem… we didn't like the same music. Mark was mad about Northern Soul and I loved jazz funk. We both wanted dates at clubs that played our favourite hits, but one of us would always end up on the side of the dance floor politely tapping our feet, while the other danced and spun under the lights. But still, we went along, wanting to please the other. Then one day, I called Mark from my local phone box. 'Where are we going tonight?' I asked. 'I don't want to go out with you any more,' Mark replied bluntly. I was stunned, but as I went to utter a reply, I couldn't think of anything to say.

> 'What are the chances?'

When they first got back together

Heartbroken and shocked at how things had ended, I tried to put him to the back of my mind. I went on to meet someone else and, on my 20th birthday, got married. In September 1982, I welcomed my daughter Charlotte into the world and five years later, in May 1987, her sister Sophia joined us. But my marriage began to break down, and by 2004 I was single again.

Now a sales rep for a posh chocolate brand, the day before Christmas Eve that year, I went to check out our display in Tesco. As I went along the aisle, I spotted the store manager. He didn't seem

Julie before she was reunited with Mark

The couple now

On their wedding day

to like sales reps and quickly sent me packing. On a whim, I went to a Sainsbury's nearby instead. As I checked out the display there, I noticed two women whispering and staring at me. They looked familiar and, after a few seconds, I realised it was Mark's mum, Joyce, and his sister Jan. *What are the chances?* I thought. I hadn't laid eyes on them since Mark and I split up 26 years before. 'I knew it was you!' squealed Jan, pulling me into a hug. 'You were the best girlfriend Mark ever had.' I blushed and talk turned to my marital status. After finding out I was single, Jan got a twinkle in her eye. 'Why don't I give Mark your number?' she grinned. With nothing to lose, I said yes.

I spent Christmas with my daughters, but it wasn't until January when I was taking down our Christmas decorations that the phone rang. 'Remember me?' a deep voice asked. It was Mark! Not wanting to waste time, he asked me on a date that night. We agreed to meet at an old wine bar he knew, but I was 25 minutes late. Rushing round the corner, I expected him to be long gone, but there he was, standing on the street outside. 'You were always late!' Mark chuckled. Just like that, he was making me laugh again. Dressed in a black shirt and chinos, he still looked stylish. We headed for a pub and as we swapped life stories, the years fell away.

We chatted for hours, but as so many years had passed, I told him not to dwell on our bad break-up. As Mark drove me home that night and the familiar sound of Marvin Gaye played, I smiled as I realised we finally had the same taste in music!

After that, we met up a few times as friends. Then one night, Mark called to see if I wanted to go out. 'I can't, I've washed my hair and I've got a towel wrapped around my head,' I said. 'I'm just going to sit in front of the telly.' There was no way I wanted Mark to see me in my comfies. I poured myself a glass of wine, but then, there was a knock at the door. It was Mark wearing a big grin and a towel also wrapped around his head! I couldn't stop laughing. We spent the evening watching TV and later that night, as I said goodbye, Mark kissed me and we were a couple again.

'I'm asking you to marry me!'

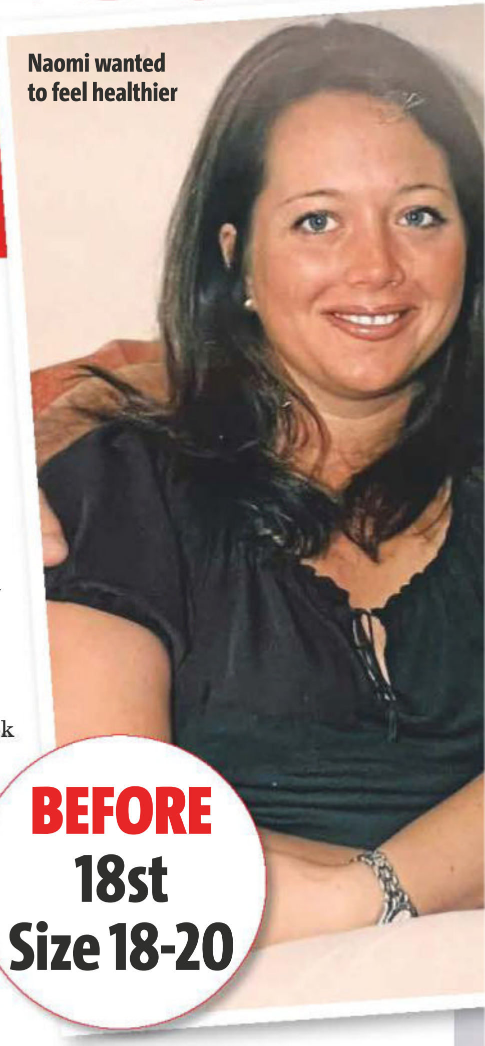
In September 2005, we were out for a walk when I saw a familiar sight – the old phone box where I'd been when Mark broke my heart. Suddenly, he grabbed my hand and bundled me inside. 'This is where I dumped you, so this is where I'm asking you to marry me!' he said, pulling a diamond cluster ring from his pocket. 'Yes,' I answered happily as he slipped the ring onto my finger. We had a white wedding in October 2006, almost three decades after we'd originally split up.

Now, we're looking forward to celebrating our 20th anniversary next year. If I hadn't gone into Sainsbury's on a whim all those years ago, I'd never have run into Mark's mum and sister. I like to think it was fate to find Mark again. Crossing paths with my past that day was a true Christmas miracle.

By Sharon Wright

'I quit my nightly boozing – and lost six stone!'

Naomi Holbrook, 50, spent most of her life yo-yo dieting until she ditched her usual tipple and made some big changes



Naomi wanted to feel healthier

BEFORE
18st
Size 18-20

Naomi in her thirties

She feels fantastic at 50

Waking up with yet another hangover headache, I dragged myself out of bed and was stunned as I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. My skin looked grey and I was so bloated. There and then I decided that I couldn't go on like this for much longer. It was 2014 and I'd just celebrated my 39th birthday with the usual drinking and over eating and now I was feeling the after effects. What I knew for sure was that I didn't want to feel like this on my 40th birthday.

My relationship with food had been a struggle since I was young. When I was 12, my mum became ill and could no longer work. She'd always been a wonderful cook but now struggled to serve up the lovely home-cooked meals she had made for us before. I'd end up eating chocolate bars after school and huge spoonfuls of ice-cream straight from the freezer before having fish and chips with Dad.

When I left school at the age of 16, I trained as a hairdresser and beauty therapist. I really struggled with my mental health and it got worse when I was 19 after Mum died. I sunk into a terrible depression and the cycle of bingeing and dieting got worse. I'd have just a shake and then go and buy burger and chips and I could never eat just a couple of biscuits, it was always the whole packet. I was 5ft 6in and wearing a size 16. I would lose a stone but then put it back on again, stuck in

Now she's full of confidence

AFTER
12st
Size 12

a terrible cycle as there was constant food noise in my head. I dated over the years but struggled to find Mr Right.

Now, as I stared in the mirror at the age of 39, I knew I needed to take action. I couldn't possibly go through one more year feeling as unhappy as I did. I knew I had to look after myself and love myself first. I stepped on the scales and was shocked to see the needle shoot up to 18 stone, the largest I'd ever been. I knew alcohol played a huge part in my erratic eating as I was drinking at least five nights a week. I'd have a bottle of wine most nights with dinner, and at the weekends I'd go out and share bottles of Prosecco with my friends as well as cocktails. It was totting up to thousands of calories on just drink alone.

My hangovers meant I always ate really carby, processed foods. I'd have a fry up breakfast and at least once a week I'd order an Indian takeaway with a curry, rice and all the sides. Even though I wasn't an alcoholic, I was a binge drinker and I knew I needed to address my relationship with booze as well as food, so I went cold turkey – and the benefits were almost immediate. After just a few days I had more energy and was sleeping better.

I made myself healthy chicken and salad sandwiches for lunch, rather than buying a panini, crisps and chocolate bar. I batch-cooked at the weekend, making chicken casseroles and spaghetti Bolognese rather than stopping at M&S on the way home and buying ready meals. I also walked the 15-minute journey to the station each morning in Hove, East Sussex, rather than getting a taxi.

I was so focused and it worked – over the next few months I lost a couple of pounds each week and my clothes started to feel looser. After 15 months, I'd lost six stone and was down to a size 10. As my 40th birthday approached in March 2015, I spent a lovely weekend away with friends in the Cotswolds. I wore a navy blue jumpsuit and felt really special.

But afterwards, even though I was at my goal weight, I knew the hard work was just beginning as I would have to maintain it. I didn't want to be a yo-yo dieter, which meant getting to the bottom of why I turned to food and alcohol as an emotional crutch. In 2019, I decided to retrain as a nutritionist and weight management coach. I carried out my own research into the neuroscience behind eating and it changed the way I thought forever. Booze had once given me confidence and hid my insecurities but now I realised I didn't need it!

I didn't ban anything from my diet as I found that to be the biggest flaw in diet culture – removing something entirely made it more desirable. Instead, I ate a little bit of chocolate if I had a craving but not an entire bar, and I would have the occasional glass of wine with a friend over dinner but would stop there. It left me happy and satisfied.

By the time I celebrated my 50th birthday in March this year, not only was I still slim and healthy but I was also the happiest I'd ever felt in my life. I was finally comfortable in my own skin and loved myself. Through thinking differently, I no longer obsess about food and I've set up my own company to try to help other women. I spent so many years longing to look different. Now, I'm happy at last and I want to help others feel the same.

● *For more information and support,visit theunconventional weightlosscoach.com*

DIET BEFORE

BREAKFAST: Pain au Chocolat
LUNCH: Toasted sandwich, chocolate bar, crisps
DINNER: Ready meal, takeaway Thai curry, kebab or pizza
SNACKS: Crisps, chocolate, nuts, fizzy drinks, bottle of wine

DIET AFTER

BREAKFAST: Omelette, ham, tomatoes,
LUNCH: Chicken and salad
DINNER: Salmon and roasted veg
SNACKS: Occasional cake, chocolate bar or glass or wine

By Helen Garston

Cosy Zip Front Velour Kaftan

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8-34
(XS – 3XL)

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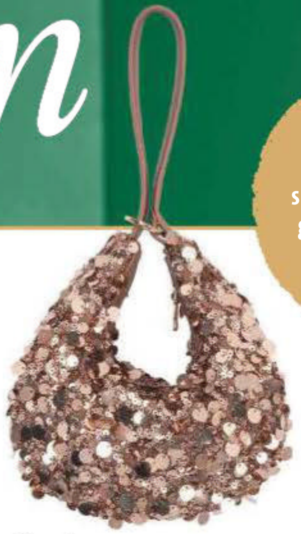
Get set for your Christmas week with chic buys from just £8

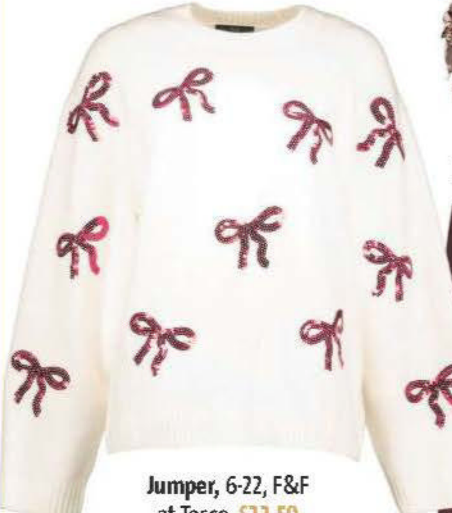
Top, 10-28, £39.99; **Trousers,** 10-28, £25.99, both Damart

Combine a cosy knit with a silky skirt for the ultimate glitzy-meets-comfy dinner table ensemble

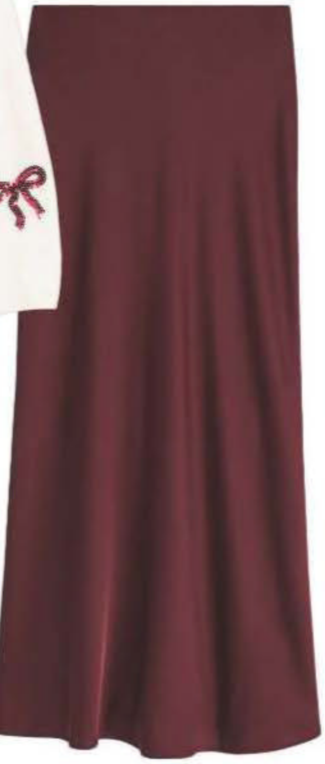
The big day



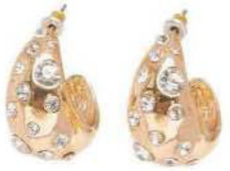
Bag, Marks & Spencer, £26



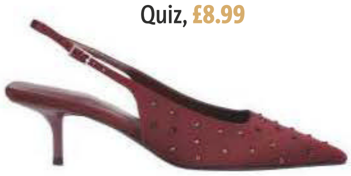
Jumper, 6-22, F&F at Tesco, £22.50



Skirt, 6-22, River Island, £29



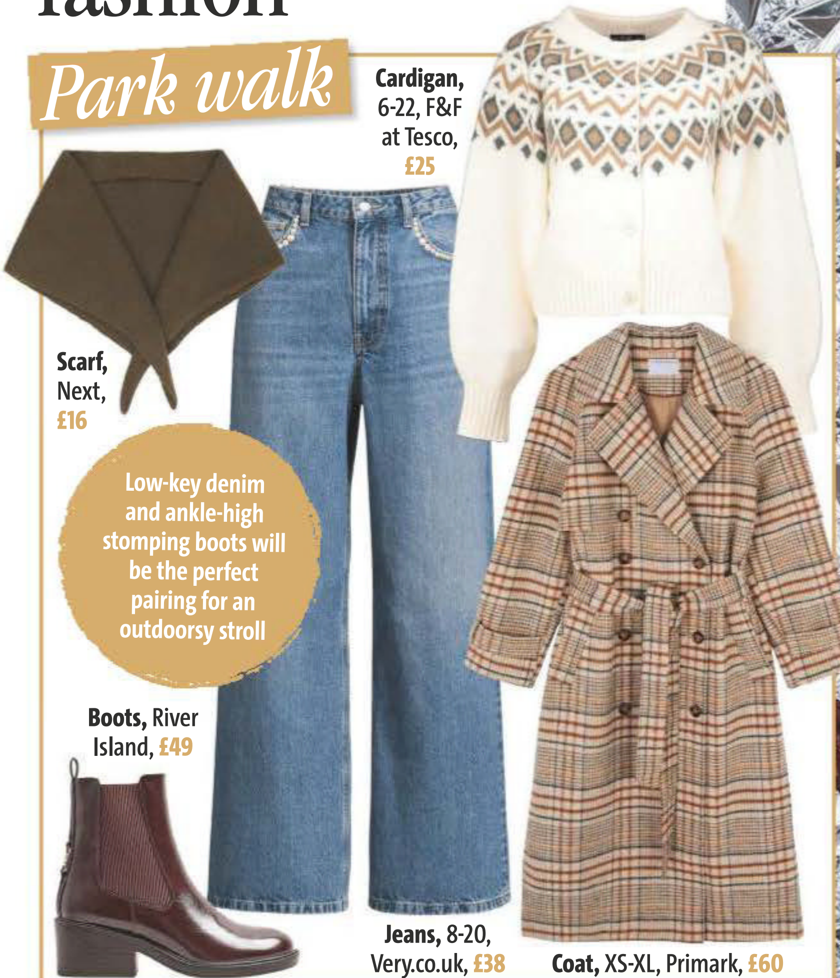
Earrings, Quiz, £8.99



Shoes, Marks & Spencer, £40

Continued over the page...

Park walk



Cardigan, 6-22, F&F at Tesco, £25

Scarf, Next, £16

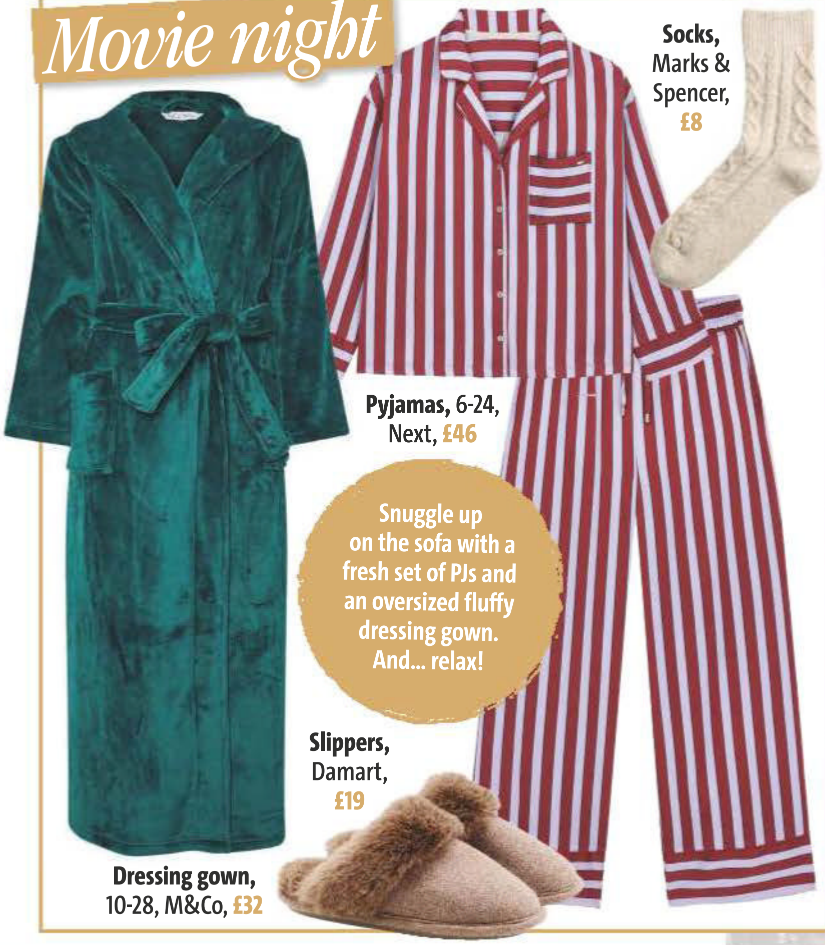
Low-key denim and ankle-high stomping boots will be the perfect pairing for an outdoorsy stroll

Boots, River Island, £49

Jeans, 8-20, Very.co.uk, £38

Coat, XS-XL, Primark, £60

Movie night



Socks, Marks & Spencer, £8

Pyjamas, 6-24, Next, £46

Snuggle up on the sofa with a fresh set of PJs and an oversized fluffy dressing gown. And... relax!

Slippers, Damart, £19

Dressing gown, 10-28, M&Co, £32

Dress, 10-28, Bonmarché, £28

Jumper, 8-18, £50; **Jeans**, 6-18, £30, both Joe Browns

Drinks with friends

Earrings, River Island, £15

Bag, River Island, £36

Dress, XS-XXXL, H&M, £54.99

Bracelet, Joma Jewellery, £23.99

Shoes, New Look, £22.99

Raise a toast in the most glamorous way with lashings of sparkles and playful accessories

Sales shopping

Trousers, 8-14, Parfois, £45.99

Shirt, S-L, Reserved, £39.99

Waistcoat, XXS-XXL, H&M, £22.99

Trainers, Marks & Spencer, £45

Bag, Accessorize, £35

Ready to hit the shops? Opt for light layers and comfy trainers and you'll be all set to bag a bargain

By Matilda Stanley

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Bag, New Look, £23.99

Earrings, Accessorize, £8

Shoes, Next, £38

Bag, Next, £45

GOLDEN *wonders*

Add the Midas touch for timeless sophistication

Necklace, Marks & Spencer, £16

Hair clip, Oliver Bonas, £19.50

Belt, Mango, £15.99

Bracelet, Boohoo, £7

Shoes, Zara, £35.99

Bag, John Lewis, £45

Ring, Lovisa, £13

Shoes, River Island, £36

Bag, Monsoon, £55

By Lucy Brown, **Pictures** Getty

10 under £10

Define lips

No festive look is complete without a statement red lip. This classic buy delivers vibrant colour and features nourishing vitamins to help keep lips feeling oh-so-soft. **Milani Classic Color Statement Lipstick in 05 Red Label, £10**

Add volume

After curling, mist this texture spray onto hair to create extra volume and help your style last longer. The best part? It's incredibly lightweight, making it suitable even for the finest hair types. **Umberto Giannini Texture Boost Volumising Dry Texture Spray, £8.95**

Umberto Giannini
Texture Boost
VOLUMISING DRY TEXTURE MIST
BRUME À TEXTURE SÈCHE
For fine or flat hair
200 ml ℮ 6.7 US FL Oz

PRO
LUMINOUS
FILTER

Primed to party

Not only can this radiance-boosting buy be used as a lightweight foundation during the day, but it also doubles up as a primer for those big nights out. **Primark PS... Pro Luminous Filter Foundation, £6**

STEP 1
MAX FACTOR X
NAILFINITY
GEL COLOUR

Master your mani

Treat nails to a DIY manicure with Max Factor's iconic crimson polish. It dries to a glossy finish and delivers long-lasting colour that rivals gel options – perfect for Xmas glamour without the salon price! **Max Factor Nailfinity Gel Colour Nail Polish in Red Carpet Ready, £7.99**

Revive cheeks

Achieve a healthy, youthful-looking glow with a touch of blusher. We recommend applying the cream option first, followed by the powders for a long-lasting, rosy finish. **Revolution Blush Icon Palette, £7.99**

REVOLUTION

Smooth strands

A small amount of this blow-dry cream can help prevent frizz, extend the life of your hairstyle, and shields strands from heat up to 230°C. Apply to damp hair before styling for effortlessly-polished results. **L'Oréal Elvive Dream Lengths Super Blowdry Cream, £5.25**

L'ORÉAL PARIS
ELVIVE
Dream lengths
SUPER BLOWDRY CREAM

Amp up the glamour with these affordable party-season essentials

Plump it up

Who needs filler when a plumping gloss can give a similar effect? Infused with chilli extract, this spicy formula boosts blood flow to the lips, causing lips to swell and appear fuller. **M&S Beauty Let's Get Plump Plumping Lip Gloss, £10**

LET'S GET PLUMP
PLUMPING LIP GLOSS

New launch

Boost hydration

Great skincare is essential before a big night out. Take just 10 minutes to apply Garnier's hyaluronic acid-infused sheet mask – it will help create a softer, smoother, and plumper base for your make-up. **Garnier Hyaluron Barrier Repair Tissue Mask, £3.49**

GARNIER
HYALURON+
BARRIER REPAIR SERUM MASK
INFUSED WITH THE QUANTITY OF 1 BOTTLE OF SERUM
15min
VEGAN

Shimmer & shine

Worried about lacklustre limbs? Just like a bronzer for your face, this instant body tanner gives your skin a sun-kissed glow the moment you apply it. It's transfer-proof and washes off easily, too. **Rimmel Sunshimmer Instant Self Tan, £6.99**

RIMMEL LONDON
sun Shimmer
INSTANT TAN
WASH OFF
MEDIUM SHIMMER

Full flutter

With its curved, curl-enhancing wand and ultra-pigmented formula, just two coats of curling mascara delivers plenty length and volume for that dramatic, false-lash effect. **Catrice Glam&Doll Curl & Volume Mascara, £4.29**

catrice GLAM & DOLL CURL&VOLUME MASCARA
ULTRA BLACK & CURL

By Cigdem Tanrioglu, **Pictures** Getty Images

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Beauty-full BAUBLES

These gift sets are the perfect stocking fillers

Silent night skincare

Estée Lauder's nighttime kit, with the best-selling Advanced Night Repair, helps to smooth fine lines, banish dryness and brighten dullness overnight so you can wake up to plumper, smoother skin.
Estée Lauder Advanced Night Repair Skincare Starter Gift Set, £37

Mistletoe ready

Treat the beauty lover in your life to this luminous trio of MAC lipsticks. The silky formula glides on with ease, leaving lips drenched in lustrous colour and ready to shine all party season long.
MAC Wildest Gleams Mini Lustreglass Lip Trio Classics, £30

Merry kissmas

Perfect your pout with a long-wear liner that creates fuller-looking lips and a high-shine gloss that delivers a multi-dimensional glow. Both come in Pillow Talk Original – the ultimate nude-pink hue that flatters most skin tones.
Charlotte Tilbury Pillow Talk Original Glossy Lips Duo, £20

Glow ho ho

Dreaming of radiant skin for Christmas? This glow-giving bauble is your festive skincare fix, featuring a brightening Vitamin C serum and eye cream duo designed to hydrate and illuminate dull-looking skin.
Q+A Merry & Bright Gift Set, £10

Festive fragrance

This fragrant set features a 10ml Arizona Eau de Parfum and 50ml Arizona Perfume Mist, both bursting with coconut, salted musks and a dash of Madagascan black pepper. It's fun, free-spirited and totally irresistible!
Floral Street Arizona Bloom Pump It Up Set, £30

Sweet dreams

Infused with organic lavender and geranium essential oils, the soothing bubble bath and pillow mist help to ease the mind and relax the body for a blissful night's sleep.
Neal's Yard Sweet Dreams Ritual, £15

Comfort & joy

Upgrade pamper time with a luxurious trio of bodycare treats. The shower oil, body lotion and hand cream deeply nourish and soften skin, while enveloping your senses in the rich, comforting scent of almond.
L'Occitane Almond Ornament, £15

Scent the halls

They call it 'the scent of Christmas' for a reason! The White Company's Winter fragrance fills your home with cosy cinnamon, clove and orange – and comes packaged as a charming hanging bauble, making it the perfect way to spread festive cheer.
The White Company Winter Votive Candle, £12

By Emma White

Body goals AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!

The stress-busting, diet-free secret to losing weight

Prince Harry, Madonna and Oprah are all fans of EFT tapping – and it's easy to see why. This simple yet powerful technique promises to reduce stress, stop emotional eating and help you reach a healthy weight, all without cutting carbs or counting calories. The best bit? It takes just minutes a day.

'Tapping isn't about restriction, it's about regulation,' says emotional freedom coach Carys Andersson, founder of the new wellbeing app VYBLY. 'It helps calm your body's stress response, which naturally leads to better food choices, less emotional eating and easier, long-term weight loss.'

Tap away the stress

EFT – or Emotional Freedom Technique – involves gently tapping on specific acupressure points on the face and body. Think acupuncture, but without the needles. 'These points send calming signals to the amygdala – the stress centre of the brain,' explains Carys. 'When cortisol, your stress hormone, drops, your body can move out of fight or flight and into rest and digest, which is where real change happens.'

Carys adds that the science behind it is stronger than ever. 'Dr Peta Stapleton at Bond University in Australia found that just one tapping session reduced cortisol levels by up to 43%, compared to a 19% drop in people who simply learned about stress,' she says. 'So, it's not just woo-woo, there's real data behind it.'

She's passionate about shaking off tapping's mystical reputation, too. 'It's based on the same meridian system used in traditional Chinese medicine,' she explains. 'Until recently, we thought this was just energetic flow, but researchers in Korea have now identified a physical primovascular system that runs through the body. They've even injected dye to trace it, showing that the meridian points we tap on are connected. It's amazing to see the science catching up with what's been known for thousands of years.'

The weight-loss link

Having started her career as a personal trainer, Carys saw first-hand how traditional diets fail to create lasting results. 'The weight-loss industry is built on repeat customers,' she says. 'I used to lie awake at night when clients came back months later because the changes hadn't stuck. That's why I moved into tapping – it gets to the emotional roots, not just surface behaviours.'

She uses a memorable analogy: 'If weight gain is like an open wound, then diets and fitness plans are just plasters – they cover it, but they don't heal it. Tapping, on the other hand, is

about dressing the wound properly so it can heal for good.'

Carys's mantra is to 'fall in love with the body you have while creating the body you love.' She believes that body confidence and weight regulation happen hand in hand. 'When you love your body, you treat it differently,' she says. 'You choose food and movement from a place of care, not punishment.'

Rewiring your mindset

Tapping works by helping people process emotions safely while rewriting unhelpful subconscious beliefs. 'We all carry stories like "It's hard for me to lose weight" or "I always fall off the wagon,"' says Carys. 'By tapping while acknowledging these beliefs – for example, "Even though I feel like I'll never lose weight, I completely love and accept myself." You calm the nervous system and make space for new, supportive patterns.'

Carys explains that sometimes the body holds onto weight as a form of emotional protection. 'It's not always about calories or willpower,' she says. 'For some people, keeping weight on feels safer, such as if they're subconsciously scared of being visible or entering a relationship. Once that emotion is released, the body naturally lets go.'

Her go-to method for emotional eating is the 'Tap Before You Snack' routine – a simple in-the-moment reset anyone can try.

'When you feel that urge to grab crisps or chocolate, pause,' Carys suggests. 'Rate the craving out of 10, then tap through the points while saying something like, "Even though I really want these crisps, I love and accept myself." As you tap, that craving might drop from a 10 to a four or even disappear. Then ask yourself, "What do I actually need?" Maybe it's rest, comfort or reassurance. Once you calm the stress, the urge usually fades too.'

Unlike restrictive advice like "don't buy snacks" or "hide the chocolate", this approach deals with the emotion driving the behaviour. 'You're not just managing the symptom,' she says. 'You're addressing the cause.'

Lasting results

While crash diets offer short-term results, tapping's effects appear to be long term. 'Studies show that even after two years, people who used tapping maintained their weight loss, and that's without being prescribed any diet or exercise plan,' says Carys.

'People think they need more willpower, but what they actually need is a calmer nervous system. Once that's in place, healthy habits happen naturally. It's life-changing work.'

Build better habits

Beyond weight loss, tapping can be used for motivation, focus and everyday stress. 'If you're struggling to work out, start with, "Even though I don't feel motivated to go to the gym, I accept how I feel,"' says Carys. 'Once that energy shifts, move towards, "I'm excited to move my body, I can feel my energy rising." Within five minutes, most people feel ready to go.'

Carys's new app, VYBLY (pronounced vibe-ly), aims to make tapping as accessible as possible. 'It's about shifting your vibe to change your life,' she says. 'Each session is under 10 minutes and covers topics like stress, body confidence, relationships, money, parenting and motivation.' There are also three-minute 'Vibe Ups' for quick boosts, and themed challenges such as Finding Yourself in Motherhood and Body Confidence. 'It's £5.99 a month, and it's all about creating small shifts that make a big impact,' she says. 'When you change your vibration, you change your life.'

Continued over the page...

Carys's steps for tapping success

THE SNACK ATTACK METHOD

When you find yourself reaching for food without being hungry, or craving something processed, use Carys's Snack Attack Method to pause, reset and tune into what your body really needs.

STOP Take a physical pause in what you're doing and say the word 'Stop'

TAP Tap on the urge or craving to eat (using the script provided)

ASK Ask yourself – other than hunger, what do I really need?

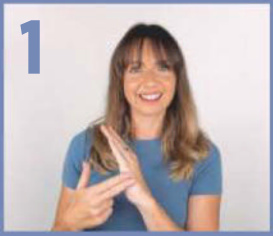
Usually, we snack or crave certain foods for an emotional reason

TAP Tap on what you really need and address the underlying emotion

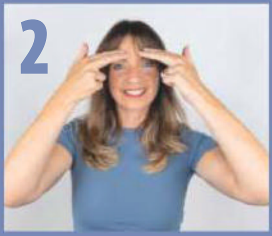
Before you begin, rate the strength of your urge or craving out of 10, for example, 'My urge to snack is at a 10.' Use one or a few fingers to tap lightly on the acupressure points shown, using one or both hands, whichever feels comfortable. Start with the set-up statement on the Karate Chop point and repeat it three times. Then move through each of the eight tapping points (excluding the Karate Chop point), saying each phrase as you go.

Continue tapping for as many rounds as you need until your score reaches zero, when you can genuinely say, 'I no longer feel the urge to snack or have cravings.'

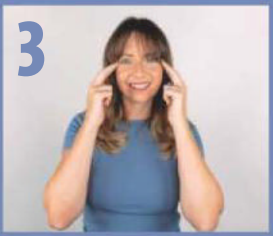
This mindful moment helps you step out of autopilot and into awareness, so you can eat with intention, not impulse.

1


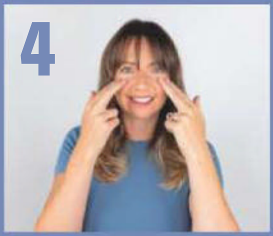
Karate Chop Point
'Even though I want this [food] and it feels impossible to resist, I completely love...

2


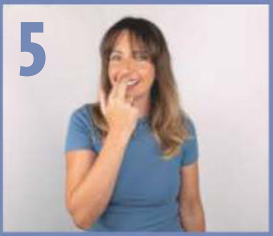
Eyebrow
...accept and forgive myself (x3). This intense craving I feel'

3


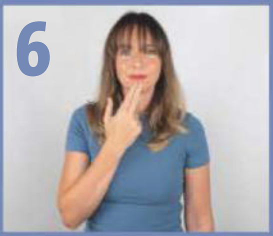
Side of Eye
'I feel like I need [that food] right now'

4


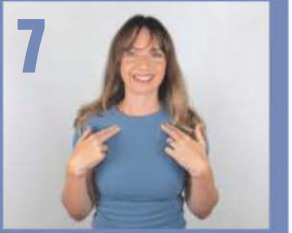
Under Eye
'I want the flavour and the taste in my mouth'

5


Under Nose
'I feel desperate to eat it'

6


Chin
'I feel desperate for the feeling it will bring me'

7


Under Collarbone
'I know it's going to make me feel better'

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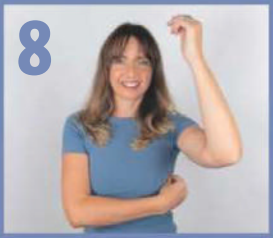
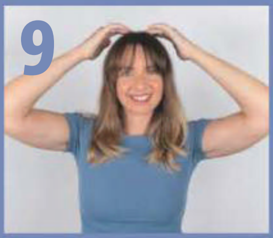
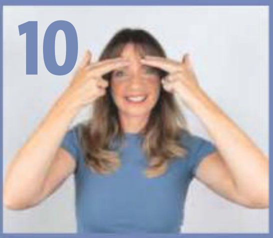


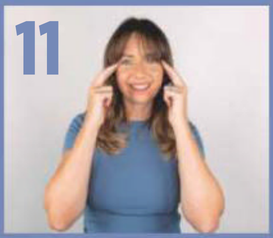
Under Arm
'My craving feels so strong'

9


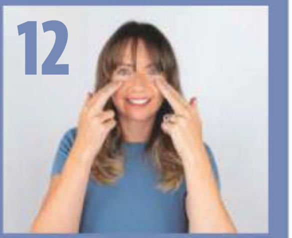
Crown
'It would be so easy to just devour that [food] right now'

10


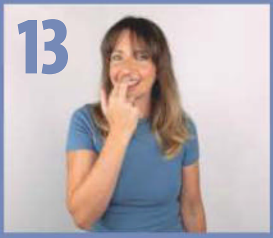
Eyebrow
'But what if I don't actually need the food?'

11


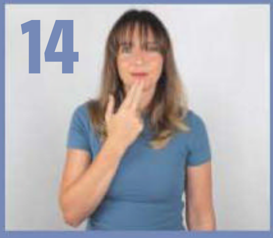
Side of Eye
'What if I can be in control of my cravings?'

12


Under Eye
'Perhaps I can let this craving dissolve'

13


Under Nose
'And move into calm and control'

14


Chin
'I invite in my strength'

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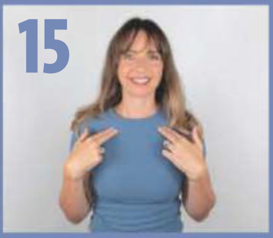

Under Collarbone
'It feels good to be calm and in control'

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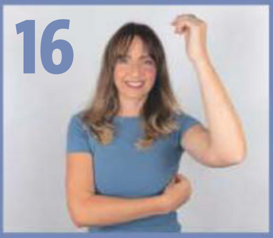
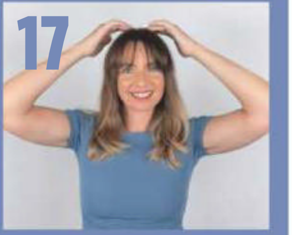


Under Arm
'I choose to be kind to myself'

17


Crown
'I am safe to go without the [food]'

By Helena Holdsworth, Pictures Shutterstock, Mac Morgan

NB. If you are pregnant, breastfeeding, under 18 or have a medical condition please seek professional advice before changing your diet.

Festive Tipples

Whether you're hosting or hibernating, we've found the perfect pours to keep spirits bright this Christmas

EXPERTLY BLENDED
ROSÉ
MULLED
WINE
orange, vanilla and mulled spice flavour
M&S

Rosé mulled wine, Marks & Spencer, **£6**

BAILEYS
TERRY'S CHOCOLATE ORANGE

Bailey's Terry's Chocolate Orange Liqueur, Waitrose, **£16.50**

VILARNAU
CAVA
VILARNAU
BARCELONA

Vilarnau Rosé Organic Cava NV, Majestic, **£13**

Triple Sec Orange, Aldi, **£4.99**

kocktail
Gingerbread Espresso Martini
kocktail

Gingerbread Espresso Martini, kocktail.co.uk, **£27**

SIPSMITH
London
Gingerbread GIN

Gingerbread gin, sipsmith.com, **£12**

Maker's Mark
BOURBON WHISKY | 45% ABV

Makers Mark Bourbon Whiskey, Morrisons, **£34.50**

FUNKIN
COCKTAILS
DELUXE LIMITED EDITION
Black Forest GÂTEAU
12%
700ml

Deluxe Black Forest Gâteau, funkincocktails.co.uk, **£13**

Cocktail crackers, mothdrinks.com, **£29**

MADE WITH FREE RANGE EGG YOLK
ADVOCAAT
ON THE ROCKS OR MAKE A SNOWBALL

Advocaat, Marks & Spencer, **£14.50**

CHRISTMAS GLOBE
SPICED ORANGE & CRANBERRY
GIN LIQUEUR
LIGHT-UP BOTTLE

Gravity Drinks Christmas Globe Spiced Orange & Cranberry Gin Liqueur, thewhiskyexchange.com, **£18.95**

No1
WAITROSE
BLONDE CHOCOLATE

No.1 Blonde Chocolate Cream Liqueur, Waitrose, **£14**

NIO
COCKTAILS
SNOW DAIQUIRI

NIO Cocktails Snow Daiquiri, John Lewis, **£7**

By Helena Holdsworth

Tip

The removable metal base of a tart tin is useful to slide the meringue from the baking paper.

Get your winter bake on with these fabulous creations

Chilly-day treats

Winter pavlova

Serves 8-10 Takes 2hr 35min-2hr 50min, plus cooling

- 250g egg whites (from about 6 large eggs)
- 1tsp cream of tartar or 2tsp white vinegar
- 400g caster sugar
- 2tsp vanilla extract
- 2tsp cornflour
- 30g flaked almonds (optional)
- Fresh redcurrants and raspberries, to decorate

CRANBERRY & RASPBERRY FILLING

- 240g caster sugar
- 400g frozen or fresh cranberries
- 175g frozen raspberries
- 1tbsp lime juice

WHIPPED CREAM

- 375ml double cream
- 150g mascarpone
- 50g icing sugar
- 1tsp vanilla extract

1 *Preheat the oven to 150°C/fan 130°C. Using a plate or the base of a cake tin as a guide, trace a circle approx 23cm in diameter on a sheet of baking paper. Place the sheet on a large baking tray.*

2 *For the meringue, place the egg whites in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Whisk on medium-high for about 1min, until frothy, then add the cream of tartar or vinegar and whisk for 1-2min, until soft peaks form. Gradually add the sugar, 1tbsp at a time, whisking constantly for at least 8-10min, until thick and glossy. Reduce the speed to low and add the vanilla and cornflour. Whisk on medium for 1min or until fully combined.*

3 *Spoon the meringue into the centre of the circle and, using a spatula, spread into an even circle, and scallop or swirl the sides as you like. Sprinkle the centre with flaked almonds, if using. Transfer to the oven and lower to 120°C/fan 100°C. Bake for 2hr – the exterior will be dry and crisp, but it will not have picked up too much colour. Turn the oven off and cool completely in the oven for about 2hr.*

4 *Meanwhile, for the cranberry and raspberry filling, combine the sugar and 50ml of water in a large pan over medium heat. Stir until the sugar dissolves and then, without stirring, bring to a simmer and cook for around 8-10min, until a deep amber caramel forms.*

5 *Add the cranberries to the caramel. Stir occasionally for about 2min, until the cranberries have popped, then add the raspberries and lime juice and bring to a low simmer. Cook for a further 2min or until the raspberries have defrosted and the sauce has thickened slightly. Remove from the heat and set aside to cool completely.*

6 *For the whipped cream, place all the ingredients in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Beat on medium-low speed for 1min, until smooth, then increase the speed to medium and beat until soft waves form.*

7 *To assemble, loosen the base of the cooled meringue from the baking paper (See Tip). Transfer onto a serving plate, spoon the cream into the centre and spread it to the edges. Spoon the cranberry mixture into the centre and decorate with the redcurrants and raspberries. Serve immediately.*

Iced VoVo mini cakes

Makes 12 *Takes* 1hr-1hr 10min, plus cooling

- 180g unsalted butter, soft, cut into roughly 6 cubes, plus extra 15g for greasing
- 180g plain flour, plus extra for dusting
- 180g caster sugar
- 50g ground almonds
- 1½tsp baking powder
- ¼tsp fine sea salt
- 3 large eggs, at room temperature
- 50ml whole milk, at room temperature
- 2tsp sunflower or other neutral oil
- 1tsp vanilla extract
- 60g desiccated coconut
- 12 fresh cherries

FOR THE JAM
- 350g sour cherry (or other red) jam

MASCARPONE CREAM
- 100g mascarpone
- 100g double cream
- 50g icing sugar, sifted

1 Preheat the oven to 190°C/fan 170°C. Brush 12 dariole moulds or a 12-hole muffin tin with the extra softened butter. Sprinkle a little of the extra flour in each mould or muffin hole, then rotate to ensure the base and sides are floured. Tap to remove the excess flour.

2 For the cake batter, sift the flour, sugar, ground almonds, baking powder and salt into the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, then add the butter. Beat on low speed for 1min until the mixture resembles large wet crumbs.

3 Place the eggs, milk, oil and vanilla extract in a medium bowl or jug and whisk with a fork to combine. With the mixer on low speed, add the egg mixture to the bowl and beat on low speed for 30sec, then increase to medium-high and beat for about 1min, until the batter is smooth and light. Divide the batter evenly between the moulds or muffin holes, about 65g each. Bake on the middle rack of the oven (if using dariole moulds, place on a baking tray) for 20min, or until a skewer inserted into one of the cakes comes out clean.

4 Allow the cakes to cool for 10min before loosening the edges with a small palette knife. Place a sheet of baking paper on top of the muffin tin, then place a wire rack on top and invert to release the cakes. If using individual moulds, invert and release the cakes one at a time onto a baking tray lined with baking paper. Leave to cool completely. Trim to level the cakes if they have formed a dome (see Tip).

5 Meanwhile, combine 250g of the jam and 1tbsp water in a small pan. Place over a medium heat until warm and loosened. Using a sieve, strain the jam into a heatproof bowl, then cool.

6 For the mascarpone cream, place all the ingredients in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the whisk attachment. Whisk on low speed for 1min until combined. Scrape down the bowl, then increase the speed to medium and whip for around 2min, until peaks form. Scrape the mascarpone cream into a piping bag fitted with a 1½cm nozzle, then chill.

7 To assemble, place the coconut in a small bowl. Brush the sides of each cake with the cooled jam, then, working one at a time, roll the cakes in the coconut until covered. Place on a serving plate and pipe a ring of mascarpone cream around the top of each sponge. Fill with about 1tsp of the remaining jam, then place a cherry on top. Serve.

Tip

If the cakes have domed in the centre during baking, level the tops as this will become the base when they are inverted.

Helen Goh
Baking & the Meaning of Life

These recipes are taken from ***Baking and the Meaning of Life, by Helen Goh*** (Murdoch Books, £26)

By Angela Romeo **Recipes** Helen Goh **Pictures** Laura Edwards

TACKLE winter tiredness

Why you're low on energy – and how to fix it

Struggling to get out of bed? You're not alone. As the days get shorter and the cold weather creeps in, many of us feel our get-up-and-go has just gone.

Whether it's hitting snooze more often, struggling to stay alert mid-afternoon or feeling constantly drained no matter how much sleep you get, winter tiredness is real. And while it's tempting to blame the darker mornings or general gloom, there are often deeper reasons at play.

From nutrient deficiencies and disrupted sleep to post-party fog, blood sugar crashes and a natural shift in our body clocks, several surprising factors can negatively affect your energy levels at this time of year.

Quality sleep beats more sleep

'Gut health, blood sugar and energy are all linked'

The good news? A few small changes can make a big difference. We've enlisted expert advice from GPs, sleep specialists and nutritionists to help you get your spark back and feel more like yourself again – even when the weather says otherwise.

The hormone link

If you're feeling more sluggish, there's a biological reason behind it. 'When we get less daylight, our brains produce more melatonin – the hormone that makes you feel sleepy – and less serotonin, which helps with energy and mood,' explains sleep coach Kerry Davies. 'So, you're not just imagining it – your body actually is being told to slow down.'

Dr Clare Rooms, GP and Clinical Lead for Insomnia at Boots Online Doctor, adds that tiredness isn't always about how long you sleep. 'Some people feel exhausted even after seven to nine hours in bed. That's because tiredness is influenced by many factors – from sleep quality and

Reset gently with routine and rest

Small changes, big difference

nutrient deficiencies to mental health and lifestyle.'

Check your levels

If you're dragging yourself through the day, it might be time to check in with your health. 'Low iron is a common cause of persistent tiredness,' says Dr Clare. 'Iron is essential for oxygen circulation – and when levels are low, muscles and organs may not get enough, leading to fatigue.'

Low vitamin D, often caused by reduced sunlight exposure, is another common culprit. 'Vitamin D plays a role in our sleep-wake cycle and mood,' says nutritionist Adrienne Benjamin at ProVen Biotics. 'When levels drop, it can disrupt energy, sleep and even gut health.' A balanced diet and, if needed, supplements can help plug the gaps.

Your GP or pharmacist can also help arrange simple blood tests to check for low iron or vitamin D levels. The fix might be easier than you think.

Sleep quality matters

'People often focus on how long they're in bed, but it's the quality of sleep that really impacts energy,' says Dr Clare. Conditions like sleep apnoea or restless legs syndrome can interrupt deep sleep, even if you're not aware it's happening. 'Without reaching those deeper stages of rest, you're more likely to wake up feeling groggy.'

Kerry agrees. 'One of the best ways to feel more energised is to keep your sleep and wake times consistent – even at weekends. And avoid lying in after a late night. That just disrupts your body clock further.'

She also recommends getting natural light in the mornings, even if it's just opening the curtains and having your coffee by the window. 'That exposure helps cue your body to wake up and resets your internal rhythm.'

Fix it with food

'Winter comfort foods can cause blood sugar spikes and dips, leaving you feeling sluggish,' says Adrienne. 'Try starting the day with protein – eggs or yogurt – to keep your energy stable.' She also recommends staying hydrated, keeping meal times consistent and including a daily probiotic to support gut health. 'Gut health is linked to immunity, mood and energy – so it's all connected.'

Dr Clare adds that small dietary shifts can have big benefits. 'Skipping meals or relying on ultra-processed foods slows metabolism. Aim for regular meals with whole grains, protein and vegetables to maintain energy levels.'

A high-protein breakfast is beneficial

Fight the festive fog

Late nights, rich food and extra alcohol all take a toll. 'Alcohol reduces REM sleep – the restorative stage – and heavy meals close to bedtime cause night-time waking,' says Dr Clare.

Kerry adds, 'You might be in bed for eight hours, but the quality of sleep is poor, so you still wake up groggy.'

Her tip? 'Don't try to fix it with one big lie-in. Reset gently with a steady bedtime, lighter evening meals, and some morning daylight exposure.'

Adrienne agrees. 'Consistency is key. Focus on balanced meals, hydration, and daily movement – even a short walk can help regulate energy.'

Feeling tired all the time might be common in winter, but it doesn't have to be your norm. Whether it's adding more daylight, moving your body more, or simply tweaking your evening routine, these small, manageable changes can help you feel brighter, sharper and more in control.

> 'A short walk in daylight can reset your body clock'

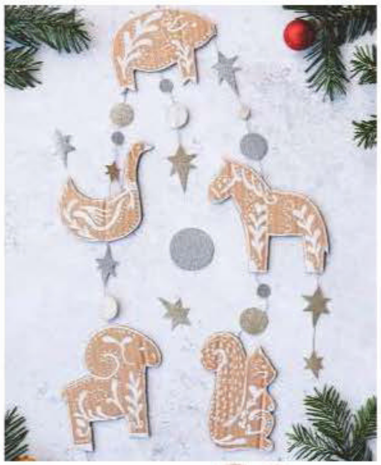
Supplements can give you an extra boost

By Emma Hawkins, **Pictures** Getty Images

Xmas CRAFTS

Let your creativity sparkle and make this your craftiest one yet

Upcycled decorations: Make a Christmas mobile using recycled card. Cut out animal shapes and decorate them with sequins, stickers and glitter. Then, cut stars and circles from glitter card. Cut lengths of string and arrange your mobile design. Apply glue to the holes in the card animals, making sure they hang slightly offset from each other. Finally, glue the stars and circles onto the strings, positioning them between the animals. Head to sostrenegrene.com for templates and video instructions.



Merry Christmas

Red Merry Christmas print ribbon, bertiesbows.co.uk, 59p per metre

Large red and white hamper, Dunelm, £8

Cotton Twist
STITCHED CHRISTMAS TREE
DECORATION KIT

Christmas tree stitched decoration craft kit, John Lewis, £13

Fresh wreaths need a backing to protect doors

Christmas wreaths: Create your own classic or frosted Christmas wreath in store or via an online workshop. All the equipment and materials are included, and the sense of achievement is worth it, when it's hanging on your door. **Wreath workshop,** from £28 a class, Hobbycraft or check out your local garden centres and florists for classes.

Easy designs: You don't need to be an artist to make your own tree decorations. These blank ceramic or paper pieces just need a lick of paint in your favourite colours, and you're good to go. **Blank decorations,** Hobbycraft, from £2

DIY
CHRISTMAS
JUMPER
Biscuiteers

DIY Christmas jumper biscuits, biscuiteers.com, £18 for two

Quick crackers: Keep costs low and personalise your own crackers. Pick up a pack of blank crackers, fill with surprises, tie with ribbons and then personalise with names in a chic calligraphy text. Crackers from a selection at Hobbycraft.

Go digital: Get crafty with some help from cutting machine Cricut. Using your phone, iPad or laptop this little gadget helps you make profession looking place names with the cut function or write tags all at the touch of a button. If you're not feeling inspired or design isn't your thing, select one of Cricut's predesigned ideas. **Cricut Joy Extra,** from £219 cricut.com or hobbycraft.co.uk

Use varnish to seal baubles

Decadent baubles: Paint your own baubles to match your Christmas scheme. Try a freehand approach or sketch out your design with a pencil first. Either way, they'll look fabulous on the tree or displayed in a bowl. Paints from a selection Benjamin Moore.

A Christmas Dream
glitter glue

Glitter glue, crafterscompanion.co.uk, £6.99

THORNDOWN
CHRISTMAS STENCIL CRAFT PACK
PEELABLE GLASS PAINT

Christmas stencil craft pack, thorndown.co.uk, £25

Idea for personalising place cards and gift tags. **Typewriter mini alphabet stamps,** Hobbycraft, £2

Merry Christmas

Oh Sew Beautiful Merry Christmas embroidery hoop kit, John Lewis, £25

Paper crafts: Designing your own wrapping helps keep costs low, or you could use it as an eco-friendly tablecloth that's easy to recycle. Choose kraft paper and decorate with your own festive designs, or use stamps and ink pads to get the kids involved. **Sample paints,** earthbornpaints.co.uk, from £5. **Paper,** The Works, £1.50 a roll

Joy
Merry
Gill
Steve

Decorate YOUR OWN CHRISTMAS TREE
choconchoc

Decorate your own chocolate Christmas trees, choconchoc.co.uk, £10

Chalk it up: Get crafty with chalk markers to jazz up mirrors, glass jars or windows with fun Christmas images. Create freehand designs or follow a template for the perfect festive finish. Best of all, they can be easily removed with water in the new year. **Chalk markers,** sostrenegrene.com, £4.54 for three

Talking Tables
EASY PEASY PAPER CHAINS
100 PACK

Folk Christmas paper chains, talkingtables.co.uk, £7 for 100

By Zoe Bishop

THE DARKEST CRIMES AND EVIL MINDS

CRIME MONTHLY

NEWLYWEDS SLAYING
WHO WANTED THE PERFECT COUPLE DEAD?
TEEN SERIAL KILLER: THE BUTCHER OF WOLLONGONG
JONBENET RAMSEY
WILL AI SOLVE HER MURDER AFTER 30 YEARS?
CRIME MONTHLY
ISSUE 82
DECEMBER 2025
THE DARKEST CRIMES AND EVIL MINDS
IN COLD BLOOD
'EVIL HUSBAND'
ELLEN GREENBERG CASE
DID SHE REALLY STAB HERSELF 23 TIMES?
TWIN FINDS SISTER'S BODY IN A BOX
HEATHER'S SEARCH FOR HER MISSING SIBLING ENDED IN GRUESOME DISCOVERY
BEAUTY QUEEN'S 'KILLER' CAUGHT STALKING FOR A VICTIM
'ESSEX BOYS' GANGLAND MASSACRE
WERE THE WRONG MEN JAILED?
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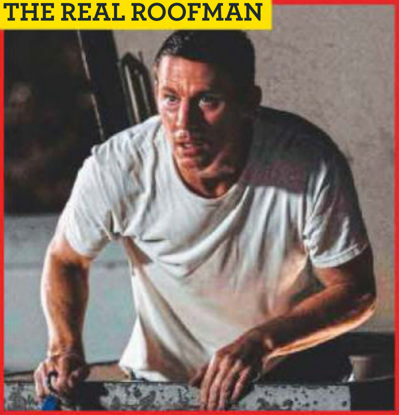
ROYAL REVELATIONS

PROVEN INNOCENT

THE REAL ROOFMAN



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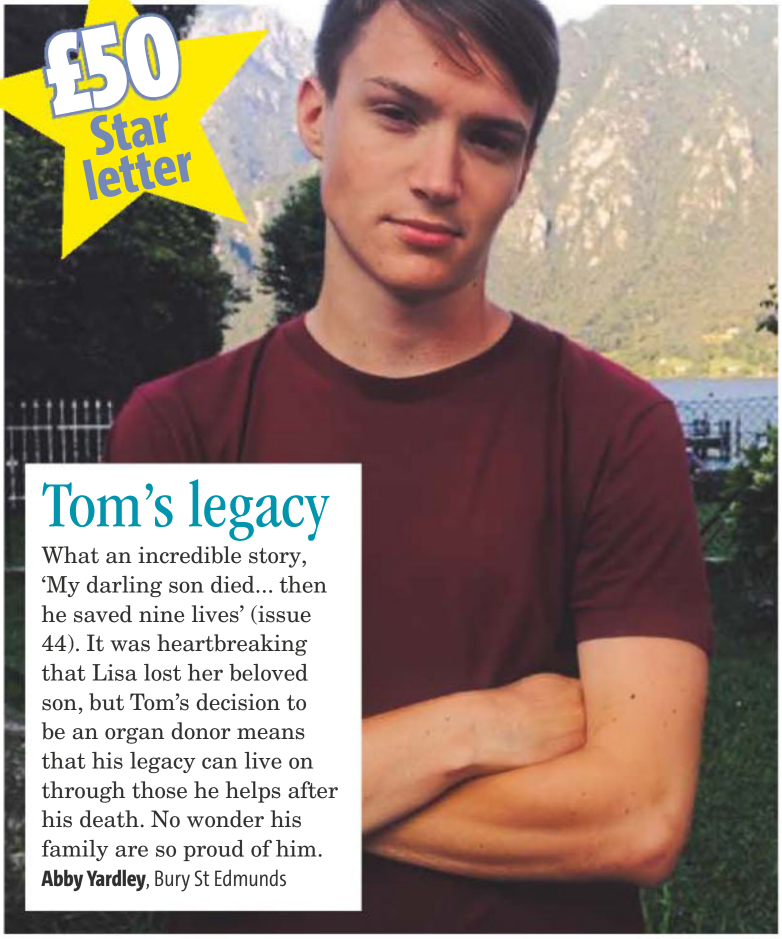
£50 Star letter



Tom's legacy

What an incredible story, 'My darling son died... then he saved nine lives' (issue 44). It was heartbreaking that Lisa lost her beloved son, but Tom's decision to be an organ donor means that his legacy can live on through those he helps after his death. No wonder his family are so proud of him.

Abby Yardley, Bury St Edmunds

Strictly speaking

Motsi Mabuse's menopause story (issue 42) is a call for change for a less chemical-based drug and an alternative for women who have had breast cancer, or if the illness runs in the family. The more women talk about menopause, the greater the awareness. It's brave of her to speak up.

Amanda Eadie, email

Talking point

A woman online has admitted feeling 'upset' after a friend started tidying her home without asking. So, we ask… Is it rude to do chores in someone else's house?

Absolutely! If someone was to do that in my home, I'd feel like they were not-so-subtly shaming me and things would turn very awkward...

Olive, Gloucester

With a busy household to run, with kids and no cleaner, I struggle to get chores done, so I'd happily welcome it.

Dayna, Nottinghamshire

I often clean up after myself when I visit my friends' homes, and don't see anything wrong with it. We've all got busy lives so every little helps.

Stephanie, London

I don't mind them doing a bit of washing up or wiping the table, but if they started to vacuum or tidy, I'd feel embarrassed. Leave my mess alone!

Elma, Coventry

By Shereen Low, **Pictures** BBC, Getty

THIS WEEK Bella LOVES...

Sleepwear for a cause

Snuggle up and twin with your little one for a good cause with these playful elephant-print pyjamas. The Stomp cotton nightwear, for women and children, is part of Next's limited-edition 'Mammoth' range with LOROS Hospice. All profits go to the hospice to support their free care services in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Available now from next.co.uk, priced from £10.

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‘Doctors told us it could be our little girl’s last Christmas’

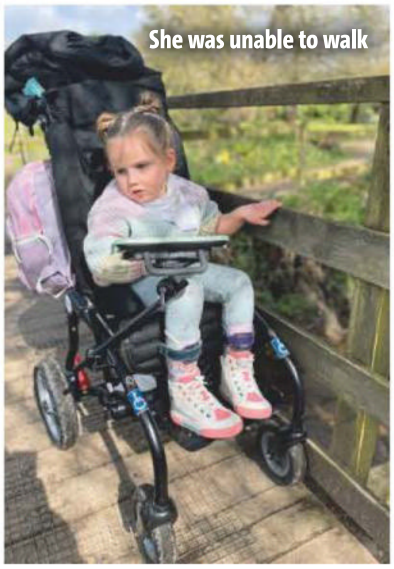
Seth, Sophie, Kyle, Skye and Axel

Sophie Kotze, 36, is determined to make special memories with her daughter Skye

Racing her brothers down the stairs, my two-year-old daughter Skye couldn’t wait to see what mischief the elves had been up to while she was sleeping. It was Christmas 2022 and our house was filled with festive excitement. But Skye was a little ball of energy all year round. Her brothers, seven-year-old Seth and five-year-old Axel, adored her. Every night in the bath, Skye would belt out the song *Girl On Fire* by Alicia Keys. The lyrics summed her up so well.

In 2023, after turning three, Skye started nursery. But on her first day, I received a call from a member of staff, telling me that Skye was slurring her words, dragging her right foot, and not using her right hand. I rushed to collect her and took her straight to hospital. My husband Kyle met us there, and we feared a stroke or a brain tumour. Blood tests, a lumbar puncture and an MRI were carried out, but they all came back clear.

Skye in hospital



She was unable to walk

Skye was transferred to a specialist hospital for further testing, but no cause for her symptoms could be found. So, the genetics team was brought in and samples of blood from myself and Kyle were sent off to a laboratory. Skye was discharged and we returned to our home in Weymouth, Dorset, but her condition deteriorated rapidly and she was readmitted to hospital. She was seen by every different department and even had tests for exotic diseases.

In the space of three months, my bubbly little girl had transformed into a different child. Skye couldn’t walk and we had to help her sit up. She stopped using her right arm, drooled, struggled to swallow and could barely speak. She needed a wheelchair and specialist equipment to help her communicate. A muscle and skin biopsy was taken from her thigh for further genetic testing. Her body was failing her but doctors didn’t know why, and we felt helpless. She’d stopped smiling, laughing, chatting and singing. It broke our hearts.

> ‘Skye was slurring her words’

A few weeks before Christmas, Skye was referred to a community nurse. It wasn’t until later we realised doctors considered our little girl to be in the palliative care stage. We read the community nurse’s report and felt blindsided to learn that Skye might have less than 12 months to

Skye is a happy little girl

live. 'I don't believe we're going to lose our little girl,' Kyle said. It was something neither of us could face, but we needed to prepare ourselves for the worst. But in the days that followed, something seemed to spark inside of Skye, as if she'd decided not to give up. It was magical to hear her giggling again.

We wanted to make it a Christmas to remember, so we booked The Polar Express train ride and visited Longleat Festival of Light. We decorated our tree as a family and Kyle lifted Skye up to place the star on top. She was happy, but there were times when the fear of losing her made me feel like I was suffocating.

On Christmas morning, her brothers had to help her open her presents. Later, as I tucked Axel into bed, he asked, 'Is Skye going to die?' 'We all die at some point,' I said sadly. 'That's why we have to live our best lives, as we never know when our time will come.' Stepping out of the bedroom, tears flowed down my face.

In the new year, Skye's deterioration was so rapid, we were told her fourth birthday would be her last. We had to decide if we wanted her to die at home, in hospital, or at a hospice, and whether we wanted her buried or cremated. I couldn't bear to think of such things. But we visited Julia's House Children's Hospice and I was surprised to find that instead of fear and hopelessness, it was a place filled with warmth and love. There were children laughing and playing in bright, colourful rooms.

'Are you OK, Mummy?'

We visited the Mermaid Suite, where we were told we'd go with Skye when the time came to say our goodbyes. Soft light poured through the window, and I knew it was where I wanted to be with my little girl in her final moments. As the months rolled on, Skye still lived at home, but Julia's House offered support. As my little girl's fourth birthday approached, doctors felt closer to finding an answer to her symptoms. They believed Skye had an extremely rare genetic mutation of the PTPN1 gene. This prevented the proper control of brain inflammation regulated by proteins in the immune response to viral infection. Skye began a six-month immunoglobulin and steroid infusion treatment. 'The infusions are like good soldiers going into your body because it needs support,' we told her.

After the first treatment, Skye stopped drooling. By the fourth, she starting to talk and was able to walk with the help of a Zimmer frame. The treatment was approved for a further six months. By the time Christmas drew near, we had to put a bell on the front of her Zimmer frame, as she was zooming around so fast.

The previous year, I'd feared it would be our last Christmas together, but now we had hope. We took the children to Lapland UK and the beaming smile returned to Skye's face. I ordered matching family pyjamas and played Christmas songs as we put the tree up in November. It was early, but I wanted to wrap us in the magical Christmas bubble for as long as possible.

When the new year arrived, Skye's singing voice returned. She belted out the lyrics to *Girl On Fire* once again and tears rolled down my cheeks. 'Are you OK, Mummy?' Skye asked. 'They are happy tears,' I replied. But just as we dared to dream that Skye might be discharged from palliative care, we were told the infusions had to stop. We always knew it wasn't going to be a long-term solution, and the consultant explained that continued use might result in side effects that could do more harm than good.

Now, Skye is still under the palliative care team at Julia's House and we are still awaiting a conclusive diagnosis, but I hope the year of infusions has given her a fighting chance. This will be her third Christmas since her symptoms first appeared. The future is uncertain, but one thing is for sure – every single moment we share with our little girl is the greatest gift we could ever wish for.

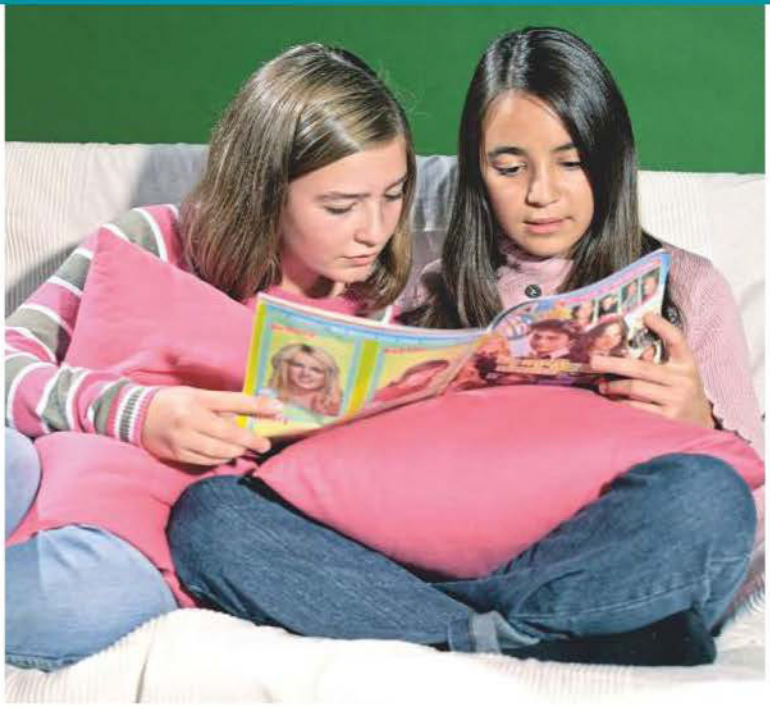
● *Help make this Christmas magical for families like Skye's by making a donation to Julia's House Children's Hospice at juliashouse.org*

By Kim Willis

Dear Kate...

Counsellor Kate Medlin answers your personal, sexual and emotional problems

We don't even know her!



Q My 12-year-old daughter met this girl at a camp she went to in the summer holidays. They became friends and have stayed in touch, via social media. They aren't at the same school, and I don't know where this other girl lives. She comes over to ours quite a lot and, to be honest, sometimes outstays her welcome. She doesn't seem to follow any rules, such as needing to be home by a certain time on a school night, and I often have to ask her to leave. I worry about her getting the bus home, but she won't let me drop her off, and said her parents are too busy to come and pick her up. I feel like I need to meet her parents to check it's OK with them that she's spending so much time at ours. I mean, do they even know where she is? I genuinely like her and don't mind feeding her, or even letting her sleep over at the weekends, but it all feels a bit odd because I know nothing about her family. My husband thinks I'm making a big deal out of nothing. Am I?

A Your letter has left me wondering why this girl has so much independence, but more importantly, seems to want to keep her parents a safe distance away from you and your family. I'm left wondering if you are providing her with the kind of family setting that she doesn't have, and therefore longs for. You are right to question why her parents don't even seem to care about where or who she is with. At that young age, parents should always know who their children are spending time with, who they are being influenced by. If my hunch is true, you and your family might be showing her a way of life that could prove to be so very valuable to her. You have rules, and boundaries. You have regular

Am I asking for too much?

Q I'm dating at the moment and struggling not to find flaws in every man I meet. My friends tell me I see too many red flags. For a recent date, I'd planned to meet a guy in a part of town I don't know, so I suggested we meet at the station as I was nervous about finding the restaurant. But he was happy to meet at the restaurant. I got lost, it was raining, and I turned up looking like a drowned rat. We did have a nice time. The conversation flowed easily and he paid which was unexpected but lovely. We even had a kiss outside, but then he didn't walk me back to the station. I don't want to be with someone who doesn't take care of me, or think about what I need.

A You are making an assumption about why he didn't walk you. Perhaps he grew up in a house of strong, independent women who would find it laughable, or even offensive, to be escorted around. Your need to be cared for is not unreasonable. But different people have different ways of caring. Perhaps it feels hard for you to express your needs. All relationships need feedback in order to grow. This isn't about telling him he was wrong, but letting him know how it felt for you. You need to own it. How a person responds to this kind of feedback can help you decide whether they're a keeper or not.

Do not disturb!

Q I moved in with my boyfriend over the summer. He has three children under 10 who stay with us every other weekend. I enjoy them being there, but I think that our bedroom should be out of bounds. My boyfriend says he doesn't like the idea of them being shut out and if they want or need to come into the room, or even into the bed, they should feel free to do so.

I've never been a parent, or a stepparent, so I'm not sure what the rules are. All I know is that I don't feel comfortable knowing they could walk in at any moment. What's the norm in a situation like ours?

A It seems like your boyfriend wants his kids to feel as comfortable at your place as they do with their mum. It's worth remembering that even if you aren't happy with them having free access to your bedroom, it is only for a few days each month. So while I understand that the kids are also coming into *your* home, not just his, could you find a way to make an adjustment for their sake? When you are in a relationship with someone who has children, it is important that you allow the kids to come first.

Letters and replies may be edited for length/clarity. **Pictures:** Alamy

Write to **Dear Kate**,
Bella, The Lantern,
75 Hampstead Road,
London, NW1 2PL, or email
bella.advice@bauermedia.co.uk.

Kate will attempt to respond to as many letters as possible through her page

meal times and your home is comfortable, stress-free and safe. You do not need to adopt her, but you seem happy to let her spend time with your family, as long as it's within the boundaries that you are comfortable with. Would it be possible for you to be more curious about her situation? Perhaps she might open up to you about what is really going on at home. If she does start speaking to you about why her parents are too 'busy' to pick her up, try not to be judgemental about them. You are already showing her that the way you parent is different, so you don't need to tell her that it's better, because she seems to have already come to that conclusion by herself. I hear of many stories where people have had very difficult home lives but have found love and care in another family and this really has allowed them to break the cycle of their own trauma.

To feel prioritised. Not in a way that indulges or spoils them. But in this situation, I think it might be you who needs to make space for them – in your life as well as maybe even in your bed!

Do you suffer from anxiety?
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Horoscopes

By Jane Struthers **For the week 25 November – 1 December**

CAPRICORN
22 December – 20 January

Grab the chance to do some socialising, preferably in a modest and gentle way rather than being part of a huge gathering. A conversation on the 29th is full of common sense and helpful ideas, with an emphasis on giving guidance.

Theme of the week: Kindness

☎ 0906 650 7239

AQUARIUS
21 January – 19 February

This is a good week for paying attention to your finances. Work out a budget for the presents and everything else you want to buy, and keep an eye out for bargains midweek. On the 29th you're reminded of an important priority.

Theme of the week: Responsibilities

☎ 0906 650 7240

PISCES
20 February – 20 March

Make the most of your current optimism and positive spirit because they're having such a wonderful impact on your approach to life. They might be exactly the nudge you need to arrange something that fills you with excitement.

Theme of the week: Joy

☎ 0906 650 7241

ARIES
21 March – 20 April

A close relationship exerts a strong pull at the start of the week, helping to make your connection even more significant than before. Mind what you say on the 28th, when there's a strong temptation to reveal something that might be better kept private.

Theme of the week: Expansion

☎ 0906 650 7230

TAURUS
21 April – 21 May 2025

The key to great relationships this week involves doing your best to understand the people concerned. Try to put yourself in their shoes, or at least appreciate that there is more than one side to any story. Love and money are intertwined from the 30th.

Theme of the week: Close ties

☎ 0906 650 7231

GEMINI
22 May – 21 June

You're in a practical state of mind right now, eager to sort out problems and devise systems that ensure your life is running smoothly. A communication glitch or misunderstanding starts to right itself from the 29th.

Theme of the week: Co-operation

☎ 0906 650 7232

CANCER
22 June – 23 July

The first half of the week is fabulous for getting together with some of your favourite people. You'd rather play than work, which could lead to slight panic stations on the 28th when you wonder how to get something done in time.

Theme of the week: Organisation

☎ 0906 650 7233

Rita Ora – 35 on 26 November

SAGITTARIUS
23 November – 21 December

A heart-warming get-together with some special people who you completely trust is the perfect way to begin the week. It also acts as a buffer against a little midweek chaos which thankfully doesn't last long. Immerse yourself in some cosy domesticity on the 29th. You really have a way with you from the 30th, making you very popular.

Theme of the week: Enjoyment

☎ 0906 650 7238

LEO
24 July – 23 August

You're being sent a strong message about the perils of possessiveness. If you feel that someone is being too controlling, you'll react by breaking free in some way. The crunch comes on the 30th, when no one wants to be taken for granted.

Theme of the week: Security

☎ 0906 650 7234

VIRGO
24 August – 23 September

Communicating with certain people has felt difficult recently, and at times you've made barely any headway, but the good news is that this testing phase begins to ease from the 29th when you can start to follow up on missing letters and emails.

Theme of the week: Emotional comfort

☎ 0906 650 7235

LIBRA
24 September – 23 October

It's one of those weeks when you feel as though you're chasing your tail, trying to get everything done in good time. You're at your most efficient on the 28th if you can slow down a little, rather than be in a rush and risk making mistakes.

Theme of the week: Conviviality

☎ 0906 650 7236

SCORPIO
24 October – 22 November

Recently you've been doing your very best to keep the peace with those around you, while taking care of your own needs as well. This is a recipe for success at the start of the week. However, the emotional atmosphere is much less stable on the 30th.

Theme of the week: Don't be clingy

☎ 0906 650 7237

For a more detailed weekly forecast call the number for your star sign. Calls cost 65p per minute plus your network access charge. Weekly forecasts last approximately four minutes. Messages are pre-recorded. For entertainment and guidance purposes only. Users must be over 18. Service provider: Spoke. Customer service number 0333 202 3390 (9am-5pm).

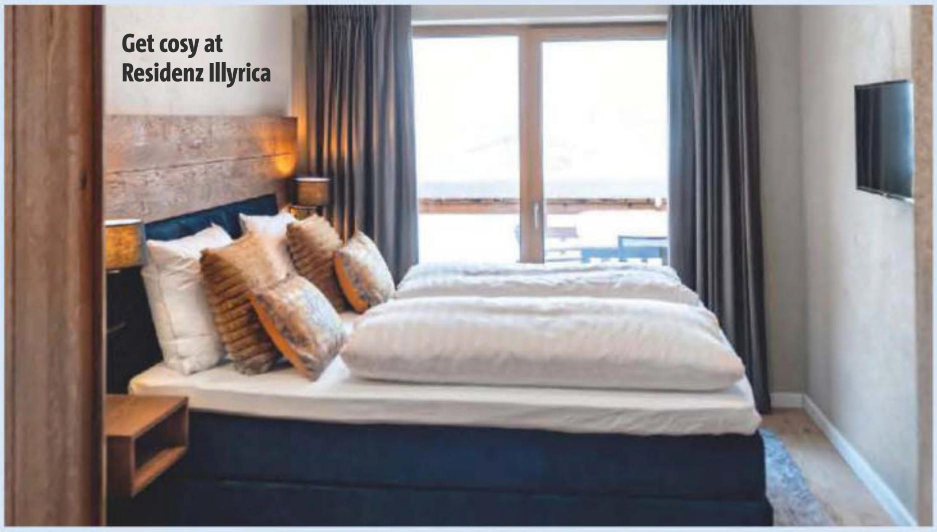
Snowy Breaks and Spa Offers

Discover the best resorts for thrill-seekers and chill-seekers alike

Bardonecchia, Italy

Recently named Europe's cheapest ski resort for 2025 by the Post Office Ski Resort Report, Bardonecchia proves you can enjoy ski luxury for around half the price of the Alps. Set in Italy's scenic Susa Valley, it offers 100km of sunny slopes, charming cafés and a relaxed, family-friendly feel. Non-skiers can unwind at Hotel Rivè's spa, complete with sauna, hot tub and Turkish bath, or stroll through the pretty town. Evenings mean hearty Italian food, local wine and fireside cosiness – all without the hefty Alpine price tag.

- **From £790pp for a week's half-board stay in February, including flights and transfers from Manchester. Book at crystalski.co.uk**



Get cosy at Residenz Illyrica

Ellmau, Austria

Tucked in Austria's SkiWelt region, Ellmau combines postcard-perfect scenery with great-value skiing. Its wide, gentle runs are ideal for beginners, while experienced skiers can explore one of the largest linked ski areas in the world. Stay at Residenz Illyrica in nearby Westendorf, just 300 metres from the ski lift and steps from the village centre. The Tyrolean-style apartments feature warm wooden interiors and mountain views, with a sauna and hot tub waiting for you after a day outdoors. Order fresh bread each morning, hit the slopes or explore the scenic trails – this is Austrian alpine life at its cosiest.

- **From £747pp for a week's self-catering stay in March, including flights, transfers and lift pass. Book at sunweb.co.uk**

Ski luxury for half the Alpine price

Soothe muscles after a day on the slopes

Bansko, Bulgaria

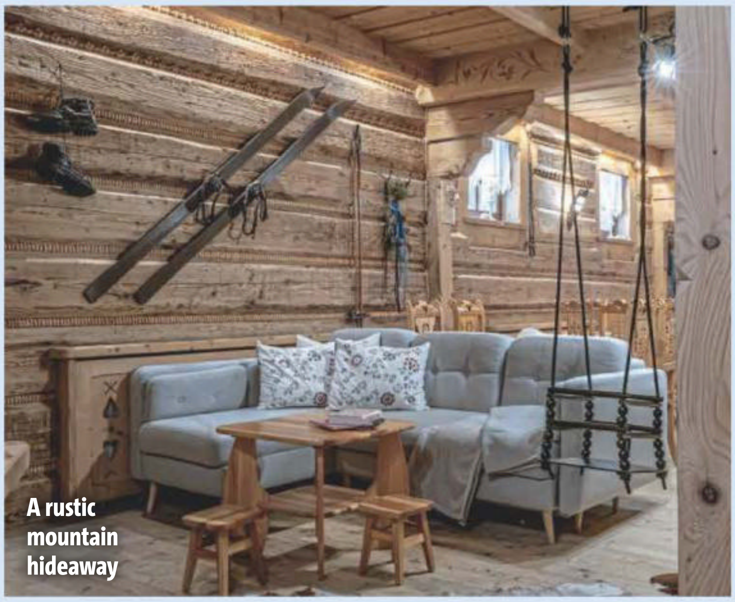
With some of Europe's lowest prices for lift passes, lessons and spa days, Bansko is brilliant for mixed groups. Skiers can enjoy wide, quiet slopes, while everyone else soaks in the town's natural hot springs or visits a local hammam. After a day in the snow, unwind in affordable spa hotels offering massages and mineral pools before dinner in a cosy taverna. It's easy to reach from Sofia, making it a smart pick for families looking for adventure and relaxation on a budget.

● From £559pp for a week in January, including flights, transfers and B&B at Saint George Palace, Bansko. Book at weski.com

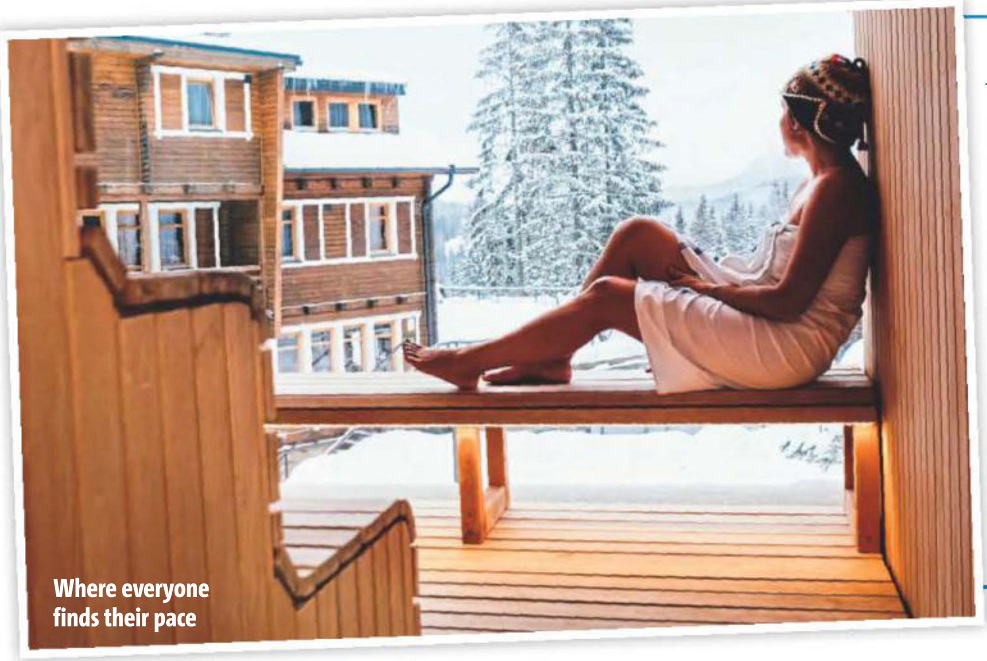
Zakopane, Poland

Poland's snow capital offers a charming mix of slopes, spas and savings. Skiers will love the scenic Tatra Mountains, while non-skiers can soak in the nearby Bukovina thermal baths or explore Zakopane's fairy tale wooden streets. Affordable spa hotels and hearty Polish food make it a relaxing and budget-friendly winter escape. It's also perfect for those who simply want snowy walks and mountain views.

● From £519pp for a February half-term week with B&B at Willa Bór, Zakopane, including flights from Newcastle and private transfers. Book at heidi.com



A rustic mountain hideaway



Where everyone finds their pace

Arinsal, Andorra

Set in the Pyrenees, Arinsal offers great-value skiing with plenty of off-slope comfort. Non-skiers can unwind in hotel spas, browse boutiques or linger over tapas lunches in the sunshine. Lift passes and lessons cost less than in most Alpine destinations, and the resort's welcoming, easy-going atmosphere makes everyone feel at home. With wide, beginner-friendly runs alongside more challenging slopes, it's ideal for mixed-ability groups. Modern hotels, scenic mountain walks and a relaxed pace add to the appeal, making Arinsal a brilliant all-rounder for families or friends.

● From £666pp for a week's half-board stay in January at Hotel Princesa Parc, Arinsal, including flights from Bristol and coach transfers. Book at crystalski.com

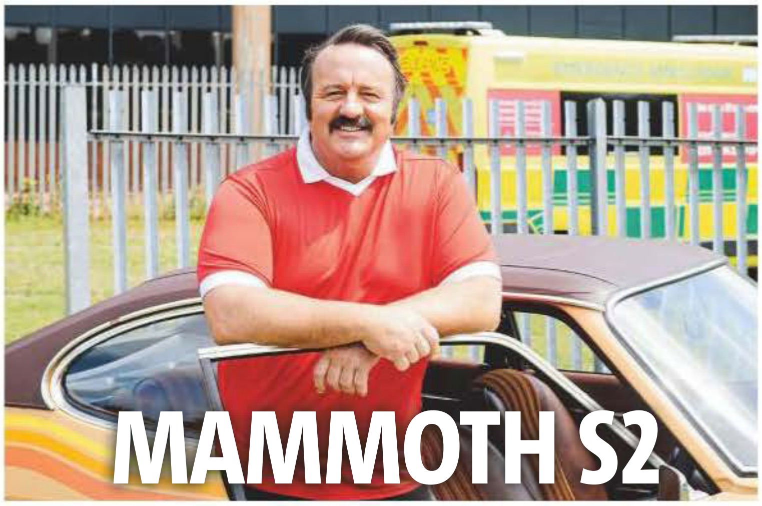
By Emma Hawkins, **Pictures** Getty Images

TV WEEK

The Marvellous Miniatures Workshop

Monday 1 December, BBC1

People's special memories are brought back to life in miniature form in this new daytime show hosted by Sara Cox. Talented model-makers recreate significant scenes from the contributors' lives in the eight-part series. And Sara hopes that viewers will be moved. 'I want them to get that fuzzy feeling in their belly when they see and hear people's stories, and when we unveil the model at the end,' she says. The show also touches on history, with one person, Sandra, recalling how her grandparents lived in Glasgow's tenements. 'It really brought a different time to life, showing us a snapshot of a society where everybody knew each other,' explains Sara.



MAMMOTH S2

Monday 1 December, BBC2

PE teacher Tony Mammoth spent decades frozen in ice following an avalanche on a school ski trip in 1979. Now he's back from the dead and struggling to cope with modern life. As the second series begins, Mammoth comes face to face with his arch enemy, Terry, at the gym. He's been holding a grudge for years and spots a chance to get even during an over-70s football match. Elsewhere, his daughter Mel foolishly takes his advice when she wants a pay rise at work. But when she issues her boss with an ultimatum, she's left without a job.

The Abandons

Thursday 4 December, Netflix

Set in the Washington Territory in 1854, Netflix's new western frontier drama follows the matriarchs of two very different families – the Van Nesses and the Abandons. Constance Van Ness (Gillian Anderson) heads up a dynasty of wealth and privilege, while the Abandons is a found family of orphans and outcasts, fiercely protected by Fiona Nolan (Lena Headey). The families find their fates linked by two crimes, an awful secret, star-crossed love and a piece of land with silver underneath. With their collision in a place just beyond the reach of justice, there is a perpetual struggle between the haves and have-nots.

By Cecile Metcalf, **Pictures** BBC, ITV, Channel 4, Netflix, Prime Video

TV timings are subject to change

Sandi Toksvig's Great Riviera Rail Trip

Saturday 29 November, Channel 4
All aboard! Join comedian, author and TV presenter Sandi Toksvig as she takes viewers on one of the world's most glamorous train journeys – the stunning South of France coast from Marseille to Menton on the Italian border. Along the way, Sandi visits a string of iconic locations beloved by the rich and famous (as well as a fair few of us civilians), including billionaires' playground, Monaco, film-festival host Cannes, the beautiful city of Nice and luxurious Saint-Tropez. She examines the stories of monarchs, artists and celebrities who transformed the region into a prestigious holiday destination. Perfect viewing for a cold winter evening.

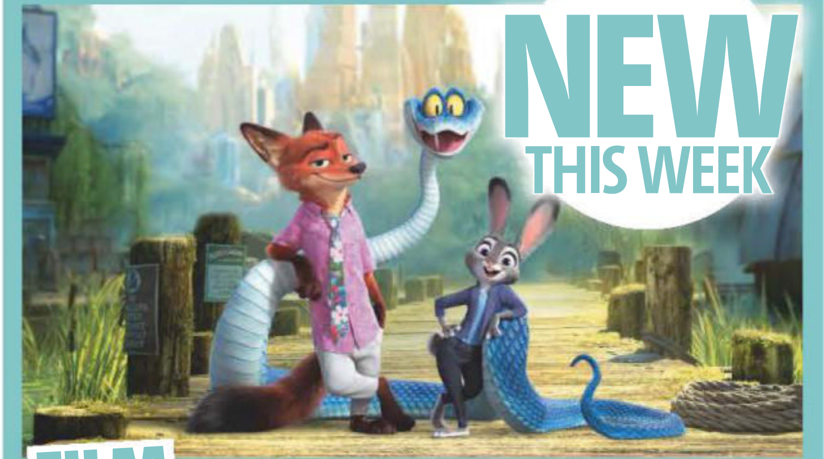
BAY OF FIRES

Sunday 30 November, ITVX
Set on Tasmania's rugged west coast, darkly comedic crime thriller *Bay Of Fires*' second series kicks off with Stella (Marta Dusseldorp) juggling solo parenting and keeping her criminal bosses at bay, while also acting as leader of the Mystery Bay residents. She's just about holding it all together, but before long, Stella and her kids find themselves sandwiched between an unhinged drug lord and a maniacal doomsday cult. There's also the small matter of the resurrection of her nemesis, Russia, and a growing civil war in the town to deal with. Looks like it's all kicking off in Mystery Bay...

OH. WHAT. FUN.

Wednesday 3 December, Prime Video
Michelle Pfeiffer stars as Claire, the glue that holds her chaotic, lovable family together every Christmas. But this year, as her grown kids and distracted husband get swept up in their own seasonal dramas, they make one mistake... they forget their mum. By the time they realise she's missing, Claire's set off on a festive adventure of her own – one that doesn't involve cooking, cleaning or coordinating anyone else's chaos. As her family scrambles to find her, Claire rediscovers what Christmas means when you're finally free to put yourself first. The cast also includes Denis Leary, Eva Longoria and Felicity Jones.

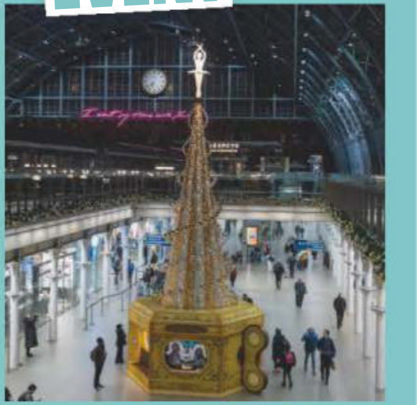
NEW THIS WEEK



FILM Zootropolis 2

Nearly 10 years on from when we first met rabbit police officer Judy Hopps and her fox friend, Nick Wilde, the duo are back at it again. This time they must crack the most intricate case of their careers, following the twisting trail of a mysterious reptile who plans to turn the mammal metropolis upside down. It'll test their partnership like never before, as they go undercover in new parts of town. Great family fun.

EVENT St Pancras International Christmas Tree



This year's much-loved tree has been revealed in partnership with Great Ormond Street Hospital Charity. The theme 'Powered by Dreams' brings to life the imagination of 38 seriously ill children from GOSH, whose hand-drawn dreams have been transformed into baubles on the gently rotating mechanism. A design with heart, the tree also has donation points at the base, to raise vital funds throughout the festive period.

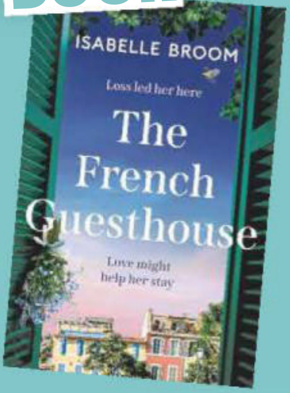
PODCAST What's My Age Again?

KATHERINE RYAN'S
What's My Age Again?
SEASON 2

The popular podcast that asks, 'How old do you feel?' has returned for season two. Each week, comedian and host Katherine Ryan chats to her celebrity guest about their lives, before revealing their biological age – done with the GlycanAge test, which measures inflammation in the body. Resident scientist Dr Nichola Conlon then discusses the results. This series includes *EastEnders* icon, Natalie Cassidy, actor Alan Davies, and Katherine's own husband, Bobby Kootstra.

BOOK The French Guesthouse

by Isabelle Broom (Hodder)
On the night Fliss loses everything – her hotel to fire and her fiancé to betrayal – she learns her estranged mother has died after 15 years of silence. Summoned to a rundown French guesthouse for the will reading, Fliss inherits her mother's possessions and painful memories. Living at the guesthouse are Etienne, her mother's grieving partner, and his guarded nephew, Benoit. As Fliss restores the guesthouse, she uncovers long-buried secrets and must decide if forgiveness – and love – are still possible. A stunning, moving read.



'Christmas d to be perfec be joyful'

Mrs Christmas is back with a one-off special

Kirstie and her team of crafters

For over 15 years, Kirstie Allsopp has been the nation's unofficial Mrs Christmas, inspiring us to get creative with festive crafts, decorations, and celebrations. But this year, on *Kirstie's Handmade Christmas*, she's inviting us to celebrate creativity and kindness rather than perfection. In true Christmas spirit, Kirstie, 54, opened the doors of her London home to *Bella*, where she chatted about her epic decoration collection, delicious new traditions and more…

How many years have you been making *Kirstie's Handmade Christmas*?

This was our 16th year and I can't believe it! Over the years, it's become a real collective – lots of the crew have worked on it for years, so everyone knows the rhythm and gets into the spirit. We filmed the episode in October this year, and by then, Halloween's nearly out of the way, so it kind of feels acceptable. There was a time we filmed in January, which I loved as it was all snowy and properly wintry. I'd love to film in January again, there's something magical about it.

You're famous for epic Christmas decorations – so where do you keep them all?

I genuinely have a barn full of Christmas decorations! They're kept in Devon. Every year, whoever was doing the décor would bring me the budget and there would always be that one piece they said we couldn't afford. I'd say, 'Don't worry, I'll buy it!' So now, I've got huge numbers. It's got to the point where I walk past any Christmas tree and think, 'Do you need any decorations?' They all live in Devon and come up when needed, and we always bring a selection because you never quite know what you'll need.

Do you have any vintage pieces in your collection?

Yes! Some are really old as my mother-in-law used to give me vintage decorations as Christmas presents. I don't use those on the

oesn't have t – it has to

Kirstie Allsopp is on a mission to make sure no one feels overwhelmed this festive season

Aprons at the ready!

show, because if they got broken it would be heartbreaking. But my own Christmas tree at home is a complete mix, because over the years I've made so many, sometimes I'd even buy the competition contestants' decorations for my own collection!

For anyone who's never seen the show, how would you describe this year's episode?
This year, it's categorically about easing the pressure. I never want anyone to feel stressed by Christmas, that must never happen. You need to look at everyone who's coming for Christmas and play to their strengths. Maybe you've got a brother who's great with kids then ask him to take them out while you're prepping. Someone might be brilliant at wrapping, another at cooking. My stepson's girlfriend, Alice, is Italian and makes the best tiramisu so that's what I'd ask her to bring! It's about everyone pitching in, not doing it all yourself.

Does this collaborative approach reflect your own Christmas at home?
It does now, yes. It didn't, but I've learned the hard way, you have to let people help, and everyone is happier for it. Particularly mums, we can all be control freaks, but it doesn't have to be perfect. At the end of the day, our table had a real '70s vibe, bits of colour and mismatched tablecloths. And it didn't matter! It was about being together.

What new crafts or skills can we expect to see this year?
There's this thing now where you can use a microwave as a kiln for tiny pottery! We made Raku Christmas baubles that way. It's amazing as you do it with clay, and the results are beautiful.

Getting stuck in

What about a show-stopping recipe?
We had an amazing guy who did a ham with a brilliant recipe I'm definitely recreating. And then he made a drink called 'Christmas stout' – it's condensed sweetened coconut milk, oat milk, Guinness, nutmeg, cinnamon, all served tall with ice. Honestly, I was sceptical, but it was absolutely delicious!

With so much festive expertise, when do you put your own tree up?
I'm a 20th of December girl, quite close to the big day. I add a new decoration every year, and I love that there's no particular theme, just a big joyful muddle of things that I love.

This year is special as it's your first Christmas as a married couple! Congrats to you and Ben!
Thank you! Last year, we told our children [Kirstie is mum to Bay, 18 and Oscar, 16, with husband Ben Andersen] and friends around Christmas that we were getting married in January. Turns out it's a brilliant time for a celebration as everyone's so happy to have something to look forward to after Christmas. I'd recommend it!

What's your earliest Xmas memory?
Carol singing definitely comes to mind. But really, it's just the feeling of everyone pulling together to make something magical.

And your Christmas wish for the future?
After such a busy year, my new year's wish is for a calm 2026!

● *Kirstie's Handmade Christmas, Thursday 4 December, Channel 4*

By Hannah Wright and Cecile Metcalf, **Pictures** Channel 4

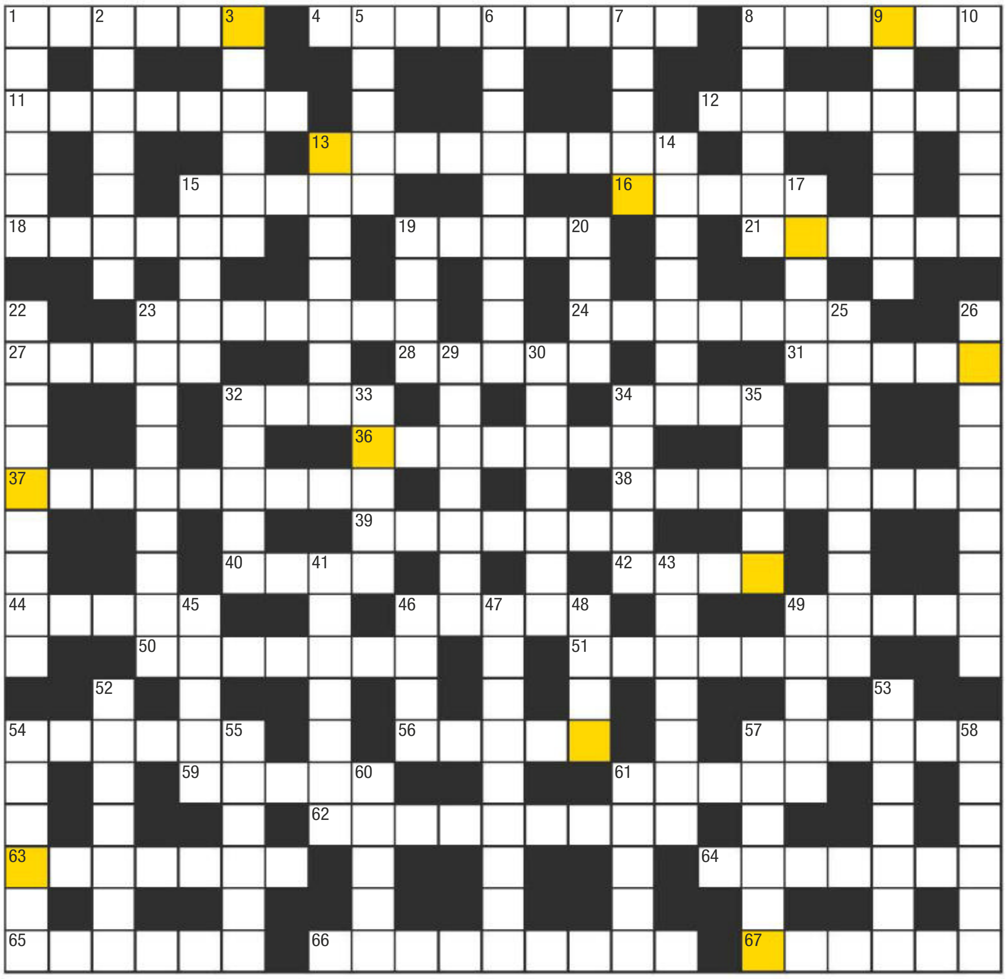
Puzzles

YOU could be in with a chance of winning £200

PRIZE crossword

WIN £200

Solve the crossword to find, reading from top to bottom in the shaded squares, the name of a British actress. This is your competition entry answer. See the 'How to enter' panel, below right.



Across

1 --- L Jackson, Nick Fury in numerous Marvel superhero films, pictured below (6)

4 Verdant area of land that's legally protected from being built on (5,4)

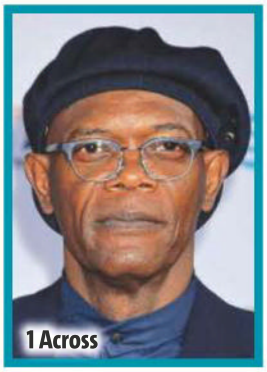
8 Red salad fruit (6)

11 On the way (2,5)

12 Easily broken (7)

13 Ability to experience feelings and sensations, anagram of TEN NIECES (9)

15 Champagne glass (5)



1 Across

16 Muggy, close (5)

18 Call for a repeat performance (6)

19 Musician and broadcaster who won the first *I'm A Celebrity* 'all-stars' spin-off in South Africa, Myleene --- (5)

21 Travelled by boat (6)

23 Queen classic from 1980, --- *One Bites The Dust* (7)

24 Part of an engine's cooling system (3,4)

27 Girls ---, pop group with members including Nicola Roberts (5)

28 Mildly spiced Indian curry (5)

31 Aden's country (5)

32 Conjuror's stick (4)

34 Amount owed (4)

36 Assistant of an important person, anagram of COY TALE (7)

37 Red ---, English cheese (9)

38 Old name for a rollercoaster (3,6)

39 Frankness, openness (7)

40 Jealousy (4)

42 Wartime friend? (4)

44 Eighth letter of the alphabet (5)

46 Cosmetics company, Elizabeth --- (5)

49 Adder, eg (5)

50 When the sun is over this nautical spar it's time for a drink! (7)

51 Traditional Scottish cereal biscuit (7)

54 Evening meal (6)

56 Gary ---, singer who had a hit with *Cars* (5)

57 'Atishoo!' (6)

59 Ketchup, eg (5)

61 *Boys Don't Cry* Oscar winner, Hilary --- (5)

62 Long-standing custom (9)

63 Drape (7)

64 Stammer (7)

65 Governing (6)

66 Part of a cooked chicken that's Ringo Starr's favourite! (9)

67 Coiffure (6)

Down

1 --- Nicks, songwriter and vocalist with Fleetwood Mac, pictured below right (6)

2 North African nation (7)

3 --- gem, variety of lettuce (6)

5 India's currency unit (5)

6 Ship or aircraft's wayfinder (9)

7 Meal eaten at **48D**? (5)

8 Time-travelling police box in *Doctor Who* (6)

9 Classic Pink Floyd album, anagram of NAIL SAM (7)

10 Followed orders (6)

13 National treasure who took part in *Celebrity Traitors*, --- Fry (7)

14 Princess Beatrice's younger sister (7)

15 Fern leaf (5)

17 Dilly ---, shillyshally (5)

19 Captain ---, William Shatner's *Star Trek* role (4)

20 Settee (4)

22 Thick wide moustache with upturned ends (9)

23 Dictatorial rule (9)

25 Blondie hit, *Hanging On The* --- (9)

26 --- *With The Vampire*, Anne Rice novel that has spawned a film and a TV series (9)

29 *Nothing Compares 2 U* singer, Sinéad --- (7)

30 Tall post with ribbons attached for dancing round (7)

32 Squander (5)

33 Colin Firth in the *Bridget Jones* films, Mark --- (5)

34 *Will & Grace* actress, --- Messing (5)

35 Toy bear (5)

41 Bridge over a valley (7)

43 Disappointment (3-4)

45 Ancient Greek underworld (5)

46 Prayer ending? (4)

47 Iowa's capital (3,6)

48 Midday (4)

49 Pepé Le Pew, eg (5)

52 Clothing, attire (7)

53 US estate agent (7)

54 Plate for a teacup? (6)

55 --- *Bull*, Robert De Niro film (6)

57 Grab rudely (6)

58 Early form of life (6)

60 Mistake (5)

61 Gaming hedgehog? (5)

1 Down

Crossword Neil Locker. **Pictures** Shutterstock

COMPETITION AND GIVEAWAY RULES Competitions open to residents of the UK (including Channel Islands and the Isle of Man), Eire or BFPOs, aged 18 or over, except Bauer Media employees, its affiliated companies, any promotional partners, or their families and anyone connected with the competitions. Enter by text, online or phone. No purchase necessary. Answers must be the product of own work. Unless expressly stated, travel expenses and spending money is not included. There is no cash alternative to prizes and no alternative holidays can be offered. Prizes are not transferable. No responsibility can be accepted for entries that are delayed, damaged, mislaid or wrongly delivered, or for any loss in service of the online entry mechanism or for entries lost, delayed or corrupted due to computer error in transit. Only one entry per person. A winning entry is the first correct answer drawn after the closing date. For a free entry, enter online at bellamagazine.co.uk. Prizewinners will be notified by post on headed paper or by official email. The results are published. Winners must agree to the publication of their names, age and photos. The Editor's decision is final and no correspondence can be entered into. Your information will only be used to administer promotions in accordance with our privacy policy. Entry implies acceptance of these rules. Promoter: H Bauer Publishing. Full T&Cs can be found at bauerlegal.co.uk/competition-terms.html

Sudoku

Fill in the blank squares with the numbers 1 to 9 so that each row, each column and each smaller 3x3 block contains all the numbers from 1 to 9.

EASY

2				3				4
		4	2	6	1	7		
	7						3	
	4	9	7		5	1	6	
	1	7	6		3	9	4	
	9						5	
		8	1	7	2	3		
3				9				7

HARD

		7			9			
3						4	1	
					2			6
		4	6		7		3	5
		1				9		
8	7		9		5	1		
2			7					
	6	8						4
			2			3		

***Take A Break Sudoku* magazine, containing over 80 fun-to-solve puzzles, is on sale now.**

WIN £200 PRIZE Arrowword

Solve the clues, writing your answers in the directions shown by the arrows, to reveal, reading down the shaded squares, the composer Will Sharpe will be playing in a forthcoming miniseries. This is your competition entry answer. See the 'How to enter' panel below.

Fine brandy (inits)	▼	Slim Shady?	Cold meats counter	▼	Venetian painter	Bring to mind	▼	Bedecks	▼	Prized possessions	Tell (a story)	Vex	▼	--- out, make last
Calmed with drugs	▶	▼	▼			▼		Ex-PM, Rishi ---	▶		▼	▼		(Of clothes) Have on
Sign, portent	▶	🟨			Wedding promises	▶	🟨			Afresh	▶			▼
▶								Deserve, work for	▶				Darns	
Hair-removing device	No goals	▶			Tangle	▶				Civil rights activist, --- Parks	▶		▼	
--- up, overact (3,2)	Ron Howard film, --- *13*		Peepers!	▶				Killer – of dragons?	▶					
▶	▼				Will Sharpe					Dog lead		Units of electrical current		Boxing champ, David ---
Muppet stunt performer		Chewy sweet	Region, area							▶		▼		▼
▶		▼	🟨 ▼							Vacant	Not minor!		Hooligan, ruffian	
Toilet?	▶			Germaine ---, noted feminist						▶	▼		▼	
Breathing organ	▶			▼						Tennis legend, Arthur ---	🟨 ▶			
▶										Meek, fearful		Poor, in want		Perspire
Endeavour actor, --- Allam	World's longest river		Hire		Quote	▼	Tibia and femur, eg	Dines	Salad servers	▶ ▼		▼		▼
▶	▼		🟨 ▼		▼			▼	Fury	▶			Compete (for)	
Premium cut of beef		--- Doherty, actress	▶				Upper limb	▶			Day before	▶	▼	
▶				Exam	▶				Mumbai's country	▶				
Tesla tycoon, --- Musk		Foot digits	▶				Unhappy	▶			Up till now	▶		🟨

SOLUTIONS

Sudoku solutions can be found online now at bellamagazine.co.uk

ISSUE 44

PRIZE ANSWERS

Crossword

Brie Larson

Arrowword

Dental nurse

Toy and game bundle

b) 10

Full solutions to this week's prize puzzles can be found at bellamagazine.co.uk after the closing date: **8 December 2025**

HOW TO ENTER THE PRIZE COMPETITIONS

BY PHONE: 0901 130 0237

When asked for the issue number, key in 47. Calls cost 50p per call, plus your network access charge. (UK readers only.) You must be 18 or over and have the bill payer's permission.

BY TEXT: 65115

Text BEL47 then a space followed by your name, house number or name, your postcode, then your answer(s), all separated by a space, to 65115, eg Jane Smith 10 SL5 9JN Answer(s). Texts cost 50p plus your standard network rate. Keep texts under 160 characters or you may be charged for more than one text.

- If you enter after the closing date, you will not be entered but may be charged. Not available in Eire. Please ensure your entry is completed correctly, as incorrect entries may be charged but not entered. This is not a subscription service.
- **You are automatically consenting to receive further communications about these competitions from us via SMS text. You can opt out of this at any time by texting STOP to 65115.** This will be charged at your standard network rate, but you will need to do this each time you enter the competition by text. Your personal data will (regardless of whether you opt out) always be used to process your entry. For further information, see general terms and privacy policy at Bauerdatapromise.co.uk.
- Lines close at 11.59pm on **8 December 2025**.

Phone UK SP: Spoke (0333 202 3390). Text SP: Bauer Media. Email smshelp@bauermedia.co.uk or call 0330 159 2525.

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Bella
Welcome to Bella Magazine
WIN
£25
£25

Continued over the page...

Puzzles contin

BITS & PIECES

We've taken a completed crossword puzzle and cut it up to give 24 pieces. Your task is to rebuild the puzzle with the help of the piece that we've already placed in the grid.

V	U	L									
E	■	■									
G	■	P									

O	N	O
S	■	F
S	T	■

E	■	I
■	■	O
Z	E	N

D	■	M
L	■	■
E	X	I

G	A	R
L	■	■
A	D	D

D	E	■
■	F	■
L	T	O

G	O	G
■	R	E
C	E	■

■	C	O
A	L	■
F	E	R

R	■	L
I	D	E
A	■	■

C	E	D
U	■	I
D	R	U

L	■	A
A	■	I
M	A	N

~~V~~	~~U~~	~~L~~
~~E~~	■	■
~~G~~	■	~~P~~

E	■	P
■	A	R
M	■	O

■	■	B
B	E	L
R	■	I

R	E	K
E	■	E
E	L	T

N	A	I
■	C	■
■	R	O

E	■	T
D	Y	■
G	■	M

L	L	I
I	■	R
N	■	A

E	V	A
T	■	R
A	R	O

T	O	N
■	■	T
F	R	O

■	S	P
F	■	I
L	I	N

I	N	G
D	■	A
G	H	T

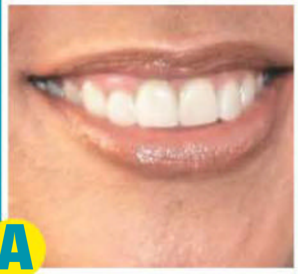
L	I	T
■	■	I
G	■	C

■	G	O
I	A	■
■	N	I

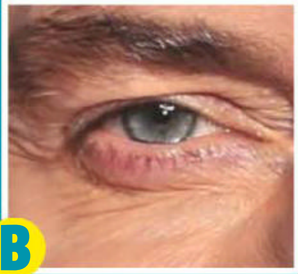
D	E	■
■	B	O
M	A	■

GUESS THE CELEB

Can you name these stars by seeing close ups of their famous faces?



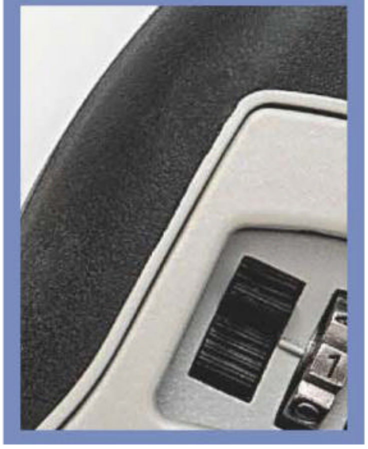
A



B

WHAT ON EARTH?

Can you guess what everyday object this super zoomed in photo shows?



ued...

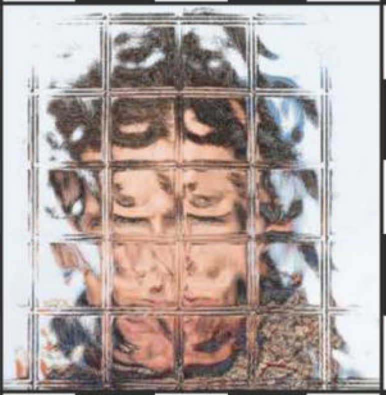
ROUND SUM

Work out the solution to the sum by following the instructions contained within the arrow.

6
x4
DOUBLE IT
÷12
+9
-11
HALVE IT
x5
+8
-9
☐

CELEBRITY CODEBREAKER

When you've solved this puzzle, use the code to transfer the letters to the numbered boxes in the lower grid and reveal the identity of our mystery celebrity.



■	9	■	19	■	3	13	12	■	11	■	20	■	10	■
23	13	2	25	19	14	■	19	22	13	2	17	9	19	21
■	18	■	25	■	13	■	13	■	21	■	3	■	13	■
20 J	4 U	3 G	■	13	16	24	23	13	21	24	■	17	5	7
■	14	■	12	■	1	■	15	■	1	■	25	■	24	■
12	19	13	14	5						8	24	14	18	15
17	■	■	19	■						■	8	■	■	19
26	4	17	5	5						11	5	24	14	13
4	■	■	4	■						■	17	■	■	16
19	14	24	21	19						13	9	3	5	19
■	24	■	19	■	3	■	13	■	25	■	3	■	19	■
20	24	25	■	26	4	17	10	10	19	21	■	13	6	7
■	18	■	16	■	5	■	4	■	13	■	11	■	6	■
20	19	8	19	5	5	19	14	■	6	19	5	21	24	2
■	21	■	22	■	1	■	19	13	18	■	1	■	9	■

A B C D E F ~~G~~ H I ~~J~~
K L M N O P Q R S
T ~~U~~ V W X Y Z

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
		G	U									
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
						J						

19	21	21	17	19	■	14	19	21	2	13	1	9	19
					■								

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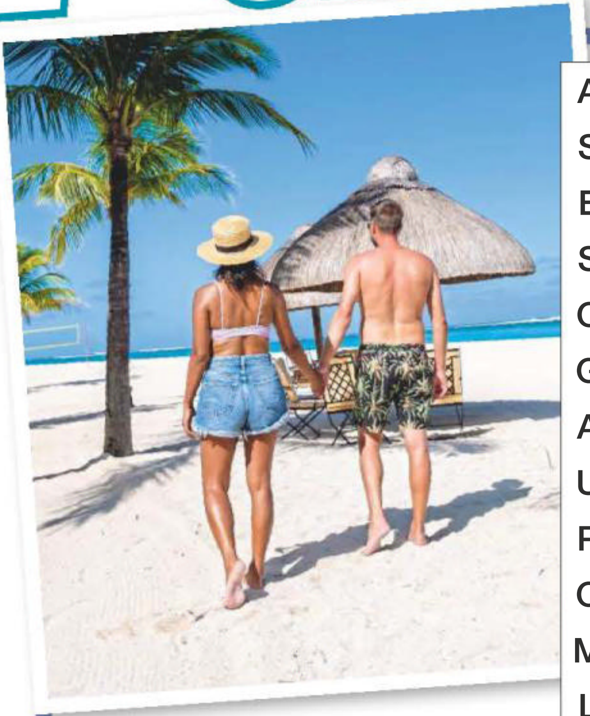
Continued over the page...

Puzzles contin



HOLIDAY ACTIVITY

Time to take a break and solve this puzzle all about booking a getaway.

A	D	O	B	T	G	S	N	G	U	A	R	A	N	T	E	E	U	H
S	B	P	Q	U	F	W	K	X	D	R	C	S	J	X	G	T	N	A
E	V	I	S	U	L	C	N	I	L	L	A	E	C	N	A	L	A	B
S	O	Y	V	I	L	C	S	D	I	S	T	U	S	K	K	R	Z	I
C	A	O	P	I	D	C	S	S	E	N	R	E	R	M	C	A	E	I
G	D	V	S	R	O	E	M	D	H	S	G	E	C	Y	A	E	N	B
A	O	D	I	U	U	R	P	A	I	A	T	T	T	T	P	N	S	E
U	C	Y	N	N	L	I	F	O	T	K	T	I	R	S	O	C	A	L
P	A	T	E	C	G	L	N	T	S	O	L	C	N	I	O	T	I	L
C	R	U	I	S	E	S	O	D	S	I	U	S	T	A	P	P	A	I
M	R	A	N	I	G	C	L	S	B	R	T	A	C	T	T	S	T	U
L	E	V	A	R	T	L	I	A	R	H	M	H	E	O	T	I	E	N
G	N	I	T	A	O	B	L	E	G	R	T	R	V	M	N	H	O	V
N	T	F	N	A	C	I	N	I	O	R	I	E	I	E	T	N	D	N
I	A	A	I	D	A	C	L	F	I	C	B	N	R	K	L	A	I	S
B	L	P	E	V	Y	F	N	P	R	I	U	A	D	W	M	S	R	G
B	U	S	A	I	E	I	S	N	G	T	R	O	Y	T	C	Y	A	L
U	I	D	T	C	A	S	T	E	E	Y	O	R	L	L	I	F	N	R
L	O	F	F	E	R	S	T	H	S	B	S	A	F	A	R	I	S	E
C	R	I	C	O	K	A	N	A	B	R	O	C	H	U	R	E	S	P
U	E	D	S	L	W	C	M	N	R	E	C	N	A	R	U	S	N	I
A	R	G	S	A	O	E	I	I	B	A	R	G	A	I	N	S	B	C
T	E	I	Y	A	T	E	N	T	S	K	R	T	E	D	L	Y	E	O
I	D	U	R	A	T	I	O	N	U	S	R	E	T	N	I	W	A	E

ADVICE
ALL-INCLUSIVE
AVAILABILITY
BALANCE
BARGAINS
BOATING
BROCHURES
CAR RENTAL
CITY BREAKS
CLUBBING
COACH TRIPS
COTTAGES
CRUISES
CURRENCY
DEPOSIT
DESTINATION
DISCOUNT
DURATION
EXCURSIONS
FIVE-STAR
FLIGHTS
FLY-DRIVE
GETAWAY
GUARANTEE
INFORMATION
INSURANCE
ITINERARY
KIDS' CLUB
LAST-MINUTE
OFFERS
PACKAGE
POSTERS
RAIL TRAVEL
SAFARIS
SAVINGS
SKIING TRIPS
TICKETS
WINTER SUN

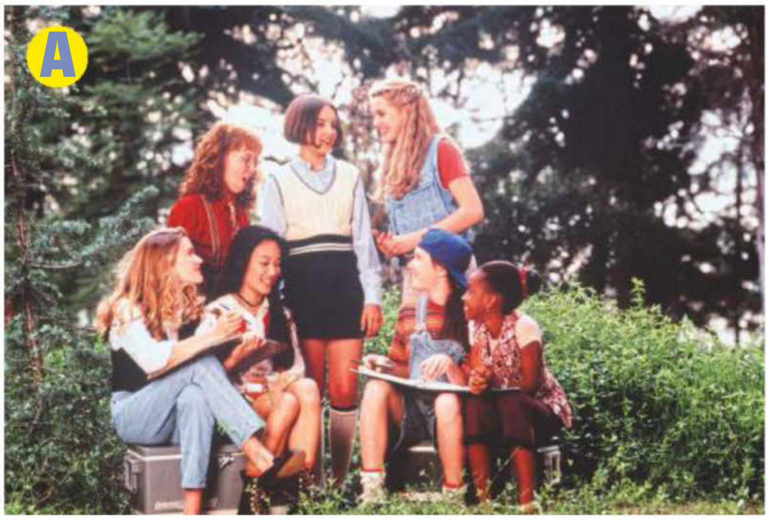
KILLER SUDOKU

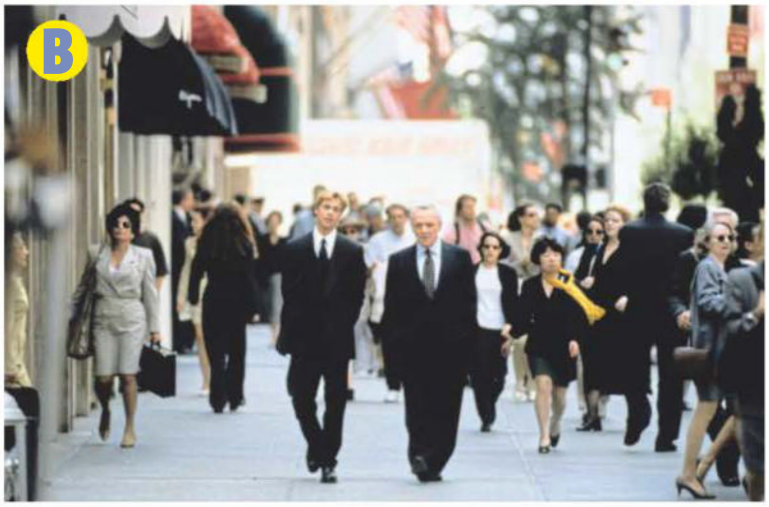
Killer Sudoku is based on the traditional sudoku grid and every column, every row and every 3x3 box must contain the digits 1 to 9. But there's a twist – the dotted squares must be filled with numbers that add up to that in the left corner.

14		6	5	9	7	2	7	3
8			11			16	9	
16	8		6		7		14	
	9	8	4		7		6	
11	4		10	7		8	8	18
	6	7		17		7		
			7	9		14		
8	11	16		5	7		3	
3		9	3		12		13	

GUESS THE MOVIE

Can you name these famous films from looking at just one scene?





Pictures Shutterstock

THIS WEEK'S SOLUTIONS

BITS & PIECES

V	U	L	G	A	R	■	S	P	L	I	T
E	■	■	L	■	■	F	■	I	■	■	I
G	■	P	A	D	D	L	I	N	G	■	C
E	V	A	D	E	■	E	■	T	R	E	K
T	■	R	■	B	O	D	Y	■	E	■	E
A	R	O	M	A	■	G	■	M	E	L	T
R	■	L	■	C	O	L	L	I	D	E	■
I	D	E	A	L	■	I	■	R	■	F	■
A	■	■	F	E	R	N	■	A	L	T	O
N	A	I	L	■	A	G	O	G	■	■	B
■	C	■	A	■	I	■	R	E	B	E	L
■	R	O	M	A	N	C	E	■	R	■	I
C	E	D	E	■	P	■	G	O	I	N	G
U	■	I	■	A	R	I	A	■	D	■	A
D	R	U	M	■	O	■	N	I	G	H	T
D	■	M	O	N	O	T	O	N	E	■	I
L	■	■	S	■	F	■	■	T	■	■	O
E	X	I	S	T	■	F	R	O	Z	E	N

GUESS THE CELEB

A Vanessa Williams

B Richard Armitage

WHAT ON EARTH?

Lock Box

ROUND SUM

4

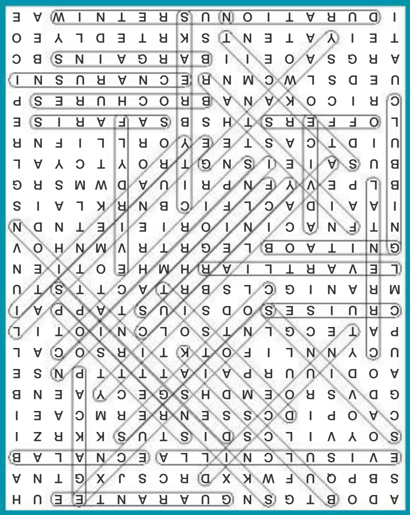
CELEBRITY CODEBREAKER

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Y	M	G	U	L	S	K	W	N	Z	F	P	A
14	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**	**25**	**26**
R	H	V	I	T	E	J	D	X	C	O	B	Q

■	N	■	E	■	G	A	P	■	F	■	J	■	Z	■
C	A	M	B	E	R	■	E	X	A	M	I	N	E	D
■	T	■	B	■	A	■	A	■	D	■	G	■	A	■
J	U	G	■	A	V	O	C	A	D	O	■	I	L	K
■	R	■	P	■	Y	■	H	■	Y	■	B	■	O	■
P	E	A	R	L						W	O	R	T	H
I	■	■	E	■						■	W	■	■	E
Q	U	I	L	L						F	L	O	R	A
U	■	■	U	■						■	I	■	■	V
E	R	O	D	E						A	N	G	L	E
■	O	■	E	■	G	■	A	■	B	■	G	■	E	■
J	O	B	■	Q	U	I	Z	Z	E	D	■	A	S	K
■	T	■	V	■	L	■	U	■	A	■	F	■	S	■
J	E	W	E	L	L	E	R	■	S	E	L	D	O	M
■	D	■	X	■	Y	■	E	A	T	■	Y	■	N	■

Mystery celebrity Eddie Redmayne

WORDSEARCH



A	D	O	B	T	G	S	N	G	U	A	R	A	N	T	E	E	U	H
S	B	P	Q	U	F	W	K	X	D	R	C	S	J	X	G	T	N	A
E	V	I	S	U	L	C	N	I	L	L	A	E	C	N	A	L	A	B
S	O	Y	V	I	L	C	S	D	I	S	T	U	S	K	K	R	Z	I
C	A	O	P	I	D	C	S	S	E	N	R	E	R	M	C	A	E	I
G	D	V	S	R	O	E	M	D	H	S	G	E	C	Y	A	E	N	B
A	O	D	I	U	U	R	P	A	I	A	T	T	T	T	P	N	S	E
U	C	Y	N	N	L	I	F	O	T	K	T	I	R	S	O	C	A	L
P	A	T	E	C	G	L	N	T	S	O	L	C	N	I	O	T	I	L
C	R	U	I	S	E	S	O	D	S	I	U	S	T	A	P	P	A	I
M	R	A	N	I	G	C	L	S	B	R	T	A	C	T	T	S	T	U
L	E	V	A	R	T	L	I	A	R	H	M	H	E	O	T	I	E	N
G	N	I	T	A	O	B	L	E	G	R	T	R	V	M	N	H	O	V
N	T	F	N	A	C	I	N	I	O	R	I	E	I	E	T	N	D	N
I	A	A	I	D	A	C	L	F	I	C	B	N	R	K	L	A	I	S
B	L	P	E	V	Y	F	N	P	R	I	U	A	D	W	M	S	R	G
B	U	S	A	I	E	I	S	N	G	T	R	O	Y	T	C	Y	A	L
U	I	D	T	C	A	S	T	E	E	Y	O	R	L	L	I	F	N	R
L	O	F	F	E	R	S	T	H	S	B	S	A	F	A	R	I	S	E
C	R	I	C	O	K	A	N	A	B	R	O	C	H	U	R	E	S	P
U	E	D	S	L	W	C	M	N	R	E	C	N	A	R	U	S	N	I
A	R	G	S	A	O	E	I	I	B	A	R	G	A	I	N	S	B	C
T	E	I	Y	A	T	E	N	T	S	K	R	T	E	D	L	Y	E	O
I	D	U	R	A	T	I	O	N	U	S	R	E	T	N	I	W	A	E

KILLER SUDOKU

6	8	4	5	9	1	2	7	3
1	7	2	8	3	6	9	4	5
9	3	5	2	4	7	1	8	6
7	9	8	3	1	5	6	2	4
4	1	3	6	7	2	8	5	9
5	2	6	4	8	9	7	3	1
2	4	1	7	6	3	5	9	8
8	6	7	9	5	4	3	1	2
3	5	9	1	2	8	4	6	7

GUESS THE MOVIE

A Babysitter's Club

B Meet Joe Black

*NB for Prize Puzzles information, see page 53

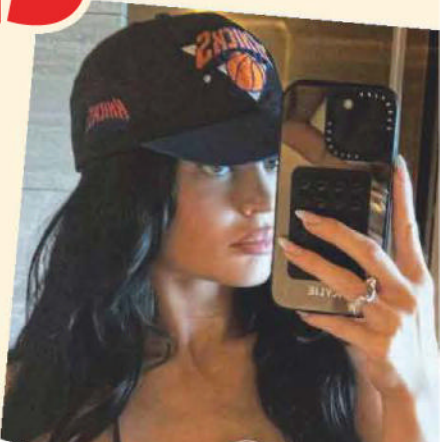
HIS AND HERS WARDROBES

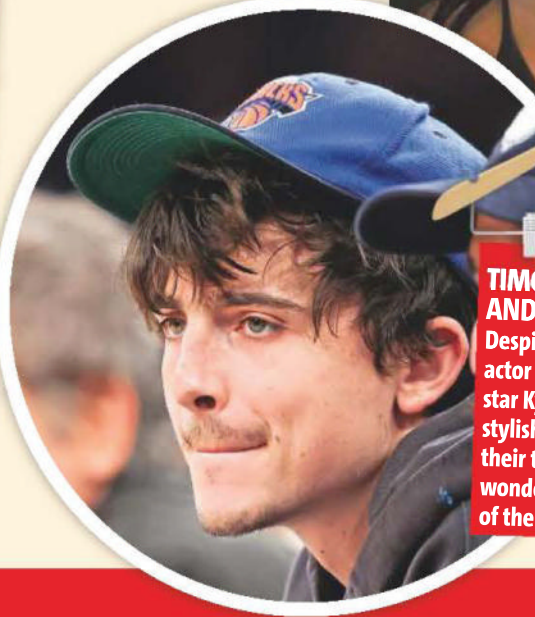
These couples dress to impress… in each other's clothes!

SIENNA MILLER AND OLI GREEN
Having been together since 2022, Sienna, 43, and Oli, 28, keep their style sharp. And it would appear they never argue over clothes – they've been seen sharing this fashionable jacket.

PRINCE HARRY AND MEGHAN MARKLE
The royal couple keep it casual and coordinated in jackets, jeans and trainers on a rainy day. Sharing their love for stripped-back fashion, Harry, 41, lent his coat to wife Meghan, 44.

A$AP ROCKY AND RIHANNA
The musical couple are both known for their edgy, trend-setting style, making waves in the fashion industry. And RiRi and Rocky, both 37, are clearly fans of refashioning, as they share this reversible coat.

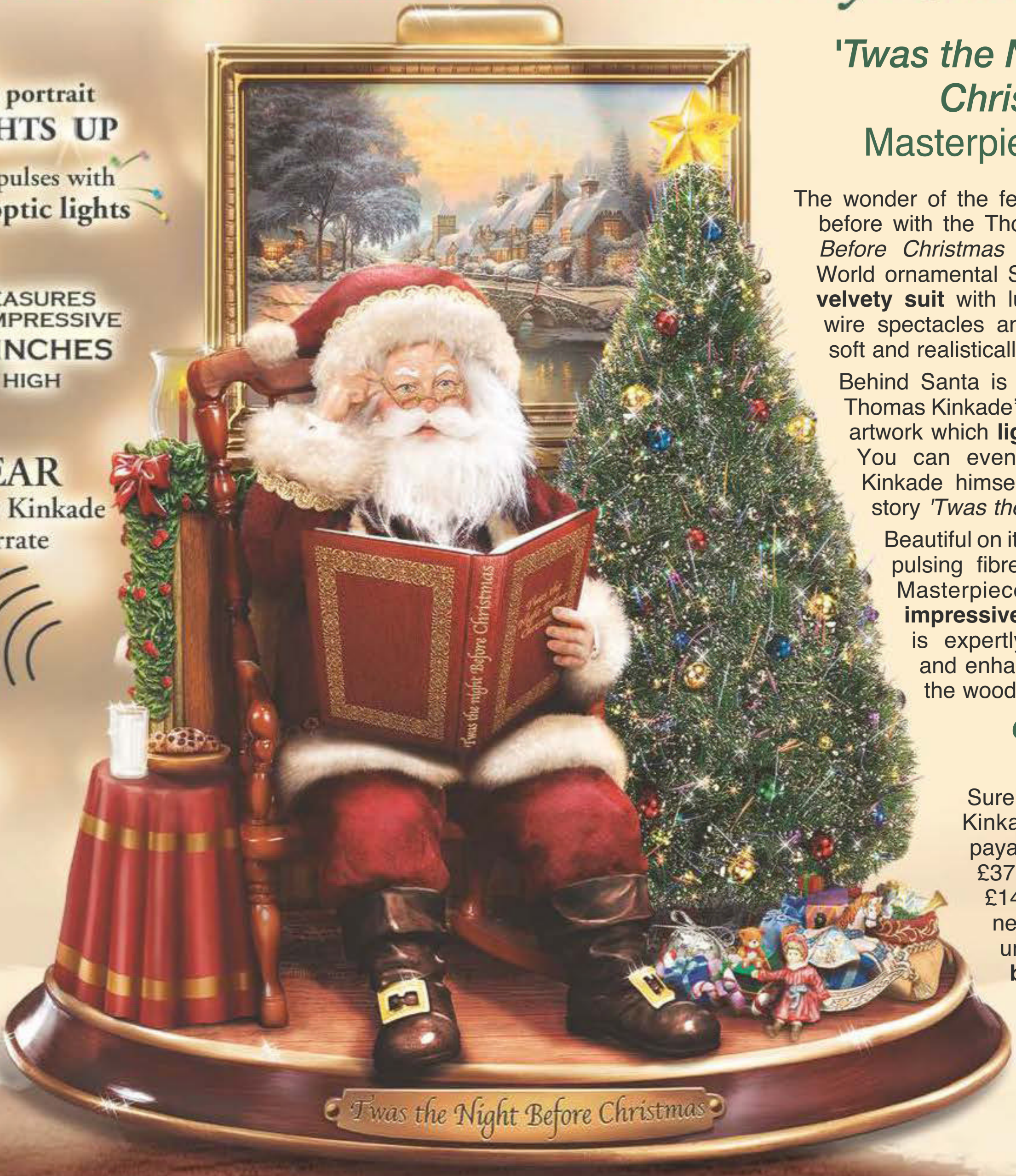




TIMOTHÉE CHALAMET AND KYLIE JENNER
Despite recently parting ways, actor Timothée, 29, and reality star Kylie, 28, made several stylish appearances during their two years together. We wonder who's getting custody of the baseball cap?

By Ramla Jeylani, **Pictures** GC Images and Getty

The First Ever Illuminated Santa voiced by Thomas Kinkade



The portrait
LIGHTS UP

Tree pulses with
fibre optic lights

MEASURES
AN IMPRESSIVE
12 INCHES
HIGH

HEAR
Thomas Kinkade
Narrate

Measures approx. 12 inches (30.5 cm) in height

'Twas the Night Before Christmas
Masterpiece Edition

The wonder of the festive season speaks as never before with the Thomas Kinkade *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* Storytelling Santa. This Old-World ornamental Santa is elegantly detailed in a **velvety suit** with luxurious faux fur trim, **golden** wire spectacles and a snowy-white beard that's soft and realistically weathered for authenticity!

Behind Santa is a uniquely illuminated print of Thomas Kinkade's beloved *Cobblestone Cottage* artwork which **lights up** at the flick of a switch! You can even hear the voice of Thomas Kinkade himself, as he narrates the famous story *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

Beautiful on its own, or glowing with colourful, pulsing fibre optic lights, this magnificent Masterpiece Edition stands at an **impressive 12 inches** (30.5cm) high and is expertly **handcrafted**, **handpainted** and enhanced with a brass title plate on the wooden base.

Outstanding value – order now!

Sure to be popular, this Thomas Kinkade masterpiece edition is payable in 4 instalments of only £37.49 – that's a total of just £149.96 (plus £9.99 S&S*). You need **pay nothing now** and our unconditional, 365-day **money-back** guarantee assures your complete satisfaction. You risk nothing, so don't wait to order. Return your Priority Order Form today!

Enhance your display with brilliant pulsing fibre optic lights at the flick of a switch

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Complete today or Call 0333 234 3687

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Address..

....

Postcode.............................. Phone..............................

Email Address..

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15-00843-001U

Order Ref:471359

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